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IN
RETROSPECT

DESIGNER BOOKBINDINGS BY
MICHAEL WILCOX

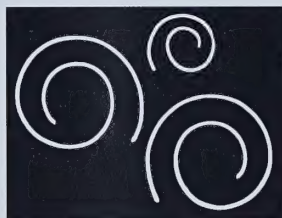


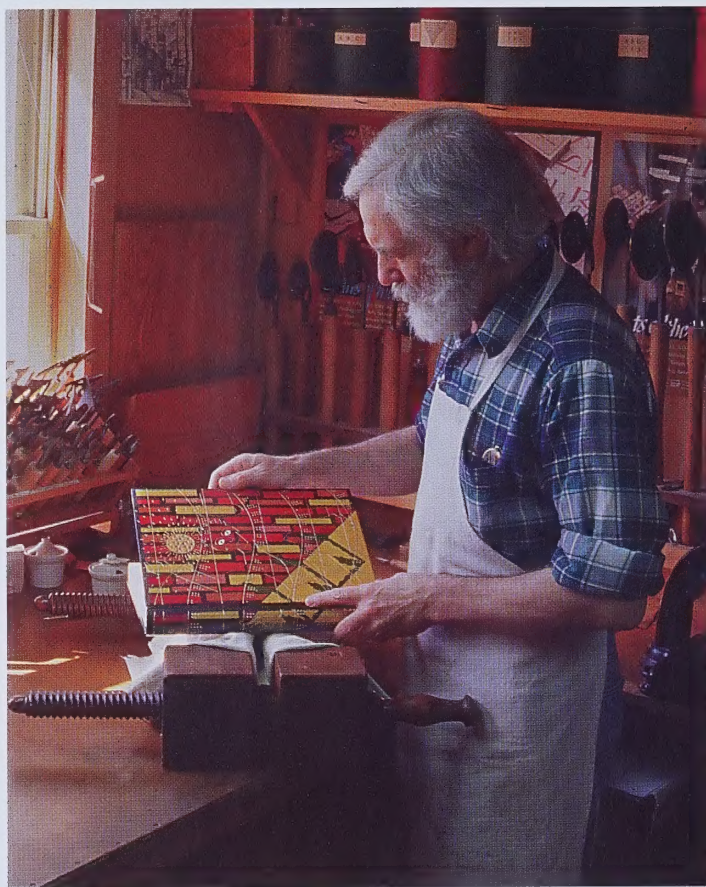
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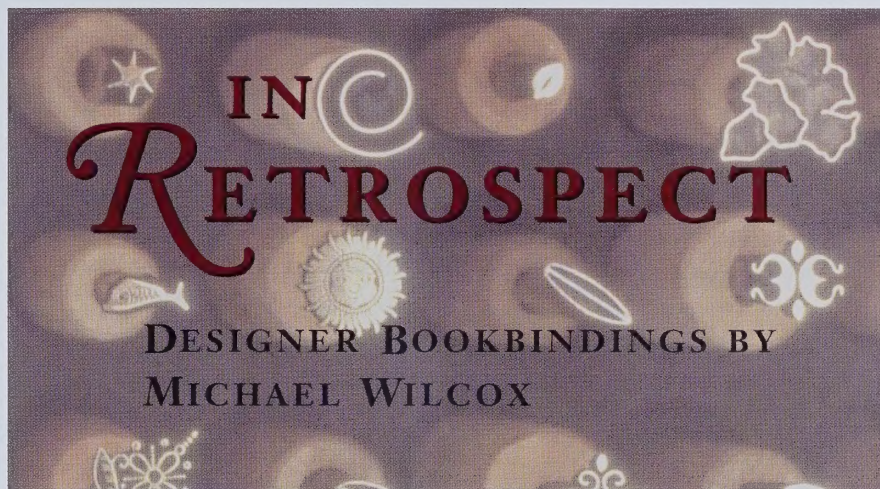
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IN RETROSPECT

DESIGNER BOOKBINDINGS BY MICHAEL WILCOX







By Michael Wilcox and Richard Landon

An Exhibition held in the
Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library,
University of Toronto

October 19th to December 22nd, 1998

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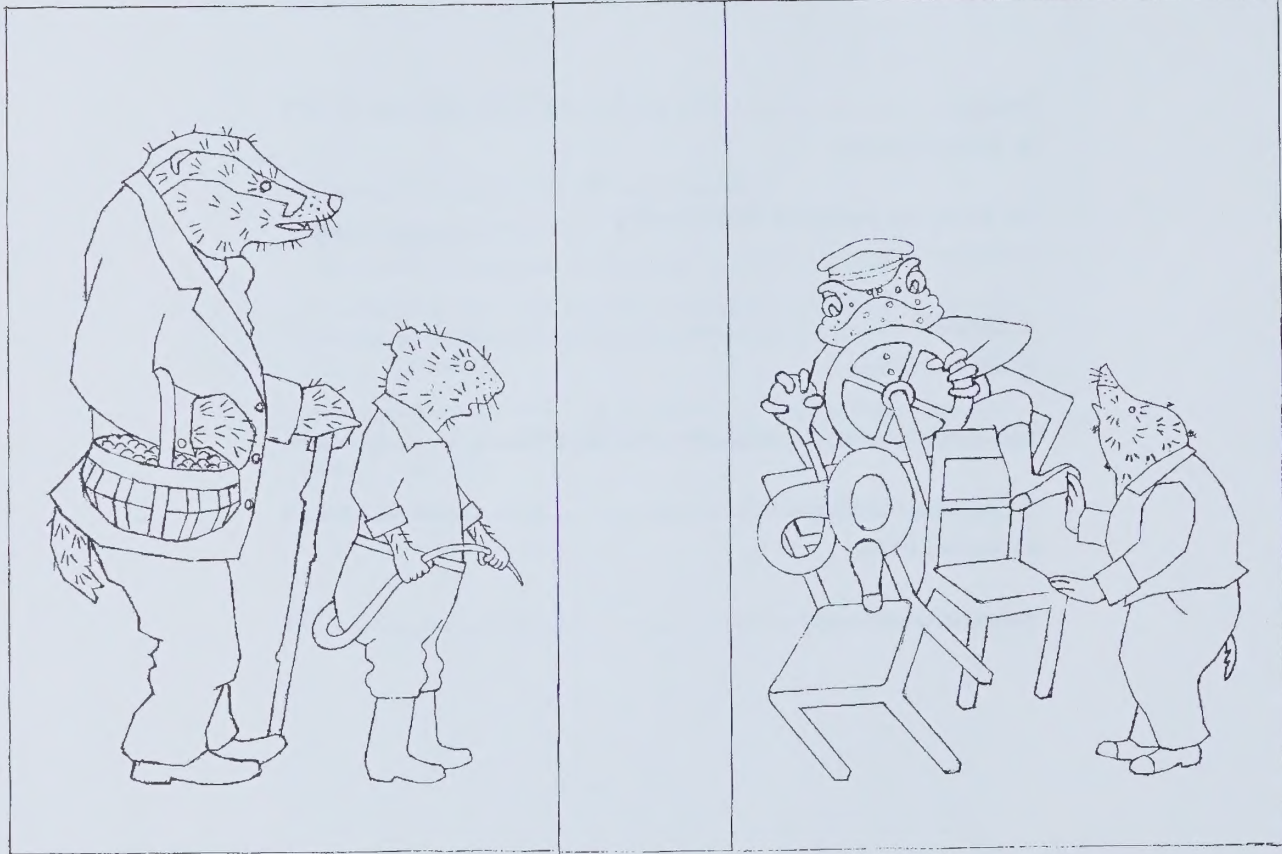
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PREFACE

IT IS A PRIVILEGE and a pleasure for the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library to present the first extensive exhibition of the designer bookbindings of Michael Wilcox. Our association with him goes back to before 1973, when the Fisher Library opened. One of the reasons that our Hannah Collection on the history of medicine has such a striking appearance on its shelves is that from 1976 to 1981 we employed Michael to rebind and repair as many of the books as he could manage. As he writes in his notes to William Thompson's *Sickness*, he performed routine repair and restoration on these books, an honourable and necessary aspect of the craft of book-binding. He also mentions his sense of relief at being commissioned to do a designer binding as his finale for the project,

which gave him the opportunity to display his art as well as his craft.

What we see in this exhibition, and in this catalogue, is very much the marriage of inspired art with impeccable craftsmanship, and this is fully realized by the individuals and institutions who have so generously lent their bindings to us. Michael's international presence is established by the fact that these bindings have been borrowed from all over North America; from Montreal to Dallas, from Ottawa to San Francisco, as well as several from Toronto itself. We gratefully acknowledge all our lenders for their enthusiastic participation in this exhibition. We also thank the Friends of the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library for providing funding for the catalogue.

Richard Landon
Director

Opposite page:

The Wind in the Willows. (page 68)

Drawing for cover design. Hairs protruding from the contours of Mole's head had been crossed out, but whiskers had been added to his snout, and his tail had been given more detail. Rat has five (correct but later changed to four) digits on each forefoot. Badger is shown with a tooth (later rejected).



Drawings for The Wonderful Wizard of Oz. (page 54)

Left: First drawing of Dorothy. Portrait derived from various photos of Shirley Temple.

Right: Drawing for portrait in its final form with Dorothy's gingham dress suggested in a way more suitable for onlay.

Opposite page: Drawing for Dorothy's portrait adapted for a two-tone onlay.

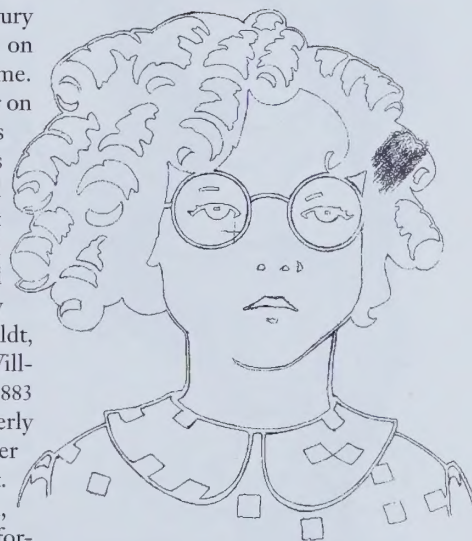
AN ESSAY ON DESIGNER BOOKBINDING

MICHAEL WILCOX practises his art and his craft within the long and hallowed tradition of book-binding by hand. Books have had covers attached to them for protection ever since the codex form of the book emerged in the second century A.D., and Coptic bindings survive from the fifth century. The earliest surviving decorated English binding covers the Stonyhurst Gospel, which can be dated approximately 650 A.D., and while the impressions on its covers are not, strictly speaking, blind tooling, by the eighth century, when the Victor Codex, at Fulda, was bound, it was decorated with small tools. Medieval treasure bindings were made for the great manuscripts of the period, employing wood, metal and ivory for covers which were then decorated with gold, silver and many kinds of jewels. The master craftsmen who produced these works of art, and even their workshops, have almost all remained unknown.

In England gold-tooling was introduced from Italy about 1530 and gold-blocking slightly earlier. Both techniques were employed throughout the succeeding centuries, often on the same binding, and both are still used today. The decorative elements of English bindings, with their many European and Asian influences, remained traditional through to the end of the nineteenth century, although remarkable effects could be achieved using the almost infinite

number of combinations of tools possible, and many of the "gilt-extra" bindings of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries are wondrous to behold. Tooling was done free-hand until about 1830, when paper patterns were introduced, although Roger Payne used blind guide lines in the late eighteenth century to produce his intricate and elaborate patterns on bindings done for the wealthy collectors of his time.

A revolution occurred in English bookbinding on July 20, 1884, for on that date Thomas James Cobden-Sanderson completed the tooling on his first binding. He was forty-three years old and had been trained as a lawyer. Legal work did not suit him and he longed for an occupation which would allow him to work with his hands, leaving his mind free to contemplate a kind of spiritual philosophy based on the writings of Alexander von Humboldt, the author of *Cosmos*. Jane Morris, the wife of William, suggested bookbinding to him in June of 1883 and he straightaway went off to Roger de Coverly and persuaded him to allow a middle-aged barrister to spend enough time in his shop to learn the craft. He spent about eight months with de Coverly and, with the aid of some manuals, was able to learn forwarding and begin fini-shing. He then set up his own workshop and began designing and executing bindings as gifts for friends and for sale, primarily through



the bookseller James Bain. He also began to design his own tools, influenced by Pre-Raphaelite art and the decorative work of Morris and Burne-Jones, whom he knew well. He won prizes at the 1887 Society of Arts competition and began to lecture to the Art Workers Guild. In 1887 Cobden-Sanderson proposed that a recently formed group of artists and craftsmen be called the 'Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society' and thus the Arts and Crafts movement came into being. At its first exhibition in 1888 he exhibited nineteen bindings and twenty the next year. He also proposed Rule 4 of the Society, which stated that all contributors to a work of art should be named, thus an early Cobden-Sanderson binding would say on it when exhibited, "sewn by Annie Cobden-Sanderson, edges gilt by Gwyn, designed, forwarded, gauffered and finished by T.J. Cobden-Sanderson".

Cobden-Sanderson's designs were fresh and innovative, often using floral motifs, and they were influential. Most importantly, the whole binding, from start to finish was the product of one person's imagination, taste and practical skill, unlike the work of the large binderies, like Riviere, where the work was divided into several segments, each part being done by a specialist. By 1893, however, Cobden-Sanderson had decided to stop doing the physical work himself and established the Doves Bindery, close to Morris's Kelmscott Press. His finisher was Charles McLeish, the sewer, Bessie Hooley, and his first apprentice was Douglas Cockerell. He continued to design and supervise the work, together with,

after 1900, the printing done by the Doves Press. The Doves Bindery lasted until 1922, shortly before his death. Cobden-Sanderson bound about two hundred books with his own hands, but although he did not bind a book after 1893, he had freed the craft of some of its trammels and pointed the way towards the designer bookbindings of the future.

The first great bookbinder of the twentieth century in England to be directly influenced by Cobden-Sanderson was, of course, Douglas Cockerell. His own bindings picked up the floral motifs of his master and were often elaborately tooled. He was equally important as a teacher who emphasized the use of proper materials and sound conservational techniques, and his book *Bookbinding, and the Care of Books* (1901 and often reprinted) is still a standard text. Like many of his contemporaries he also performed much restoration work, most notably on the Codex Sinaiticus. His son, Sydney, worked with him and continued the firm until quite recently. One of Douglas Cockerell's students was Roger Powell, who combined impeccable restoration (the Book of Kells) with beautiful design bindings. He, in turn, taught and influenced other binders, helping to create some of the traditions of the designer bookbinders of today. William Matthews, who Bernard Middleton considers "one of the finest craftsmen this century has produced", executed some stunning bindings while teaching Edgar Mansfield, Roger Powell, Elizabeth Greenhill, Peter Waters, and Middleton himself. Bernard Middleton, in the tradition of Cockerell,

Opposite page:

French and Italian Collectors and Their Bindings. (page 46)

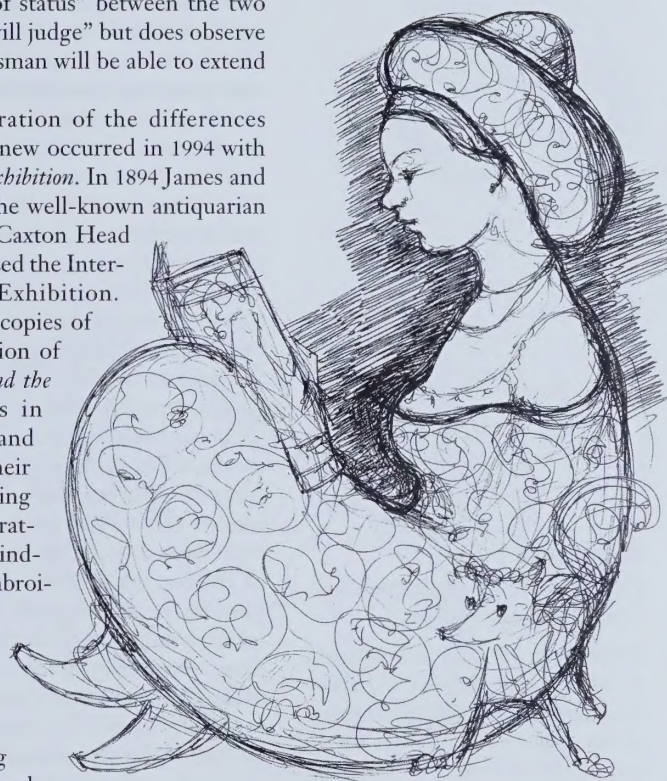
Sketch for the back cover, which shows that the Italian lady has feet (later rejected).

combines book restoration, design binding, teaching, and a high degree of scholarship, in his *A History of English Craft Bookbinding Technique*, now in its third edition.

There can be many definitions of designer bookbinding, but essentially they all involve the design and creation of a binding which combines the sensibilities of the artist with the physical skills of the craftsman. This provides a lot of scope for creative interpretation and, as Mansfield notes in his introduction to *British Bookbinding Today* (1975), there can be two approaches. A design can be created which is itself a work of art enclosing another work of art in a totally different medium. Thus, while related to the text of the book, it does not necessarily attempt to interpret that text and even may seem to be completely divorced from it. The other approach is to begin by reading the book, reflecting on its meaning, and creating a design which illustrates, comments on, or imaginatively extends the intentions of the author. This results in a 'marriage' of the book and its covering, in both a physical and intellectual sense and, when it works, is a most satisfying and illuminating experience. Philip Smith, a leading exponent of interpretive design, when he bound the Cranach Press *Hamlet* (one of seven copies on vellum and now at the Lilly Library) not only read the play, but listened to recordings and read criticism of it. He then proceeded, "using classical rules of structure, of allowing intuitive forces to select the forms, hoping in the end that by being creatively detached, but not withdrawn

from the book, a more objective statement of Shakespeare's insight projected through the psychology of Hamlet might be realized". Mansfield does not draw a "distinction of status" between the two techniques which "time will judge" but does observe that a creative artist-craftsman will be able to extend the scope of the craft.

A practical demonstration of the differences between the old and the new occurred in 1994 with the *Tregaskis Centenary Exhibition*. In 1894 James and Mary Lee Tregaskis, of the well-known antiquarian book-selling firm at the Caxton Head in High Holburn, organized the International Bookbinding Exhibition. They sent seventy-three copies of the Kelmscott Press edition of *The Tale of King Florus and the Fair Jehane* to binders in twenty-seven countries and exhibited the results in their shop, with a catalogue listing all the bindings and illustrating some of them. The binders (some were actually embroiderers) were asked not to trim the edges and to bind the book for two pounds or less. When it was revealed in a newspaper article that a binding from Copenhagen was priced at



twenty-one pounds, Riviere and Zaehnsdorf, who apparently had taken the two pound maximum seriously, protested vociferously. The exhibition was, however, a great success and was taken for a day to Windsor by Royal Command. At its conclusion, Mrs. Rylands purchased the whole collection for her new library in Manchester and there it remains today. In 1994 a committee of Designer Bookbinders decided to reprise the 1894 exhibition, and sent copies of the Folio Society edition of Andrew Marvell's *The Garden and Other Poems* to about one hundred binders in thirty-two countries, hoping for a seventy-five percent return rate. In the end they received eighty-five bindings which were meant to not greatly exceed the size of the book and to be worth between two and four hundred pounds. This collection was also sold to the John Rylands Library, now part of the University of Manchester.

In his essay in the splendid catalogue published for the occasion, Bernard Middleton emphasizes the contrasts between the team approach of the trade binders of 1894 and the largely individual efforts of 1994. Even in cases like that of Sir Edmund Sullivan of Dublin, the forwarding was done by Morrell of London. In 1894 England was the most represented country with twenty-one bindings, and all the great firms, Fazakerley, Bedford, de Coverly, Leighton, Morrell, Riviere and Zaehnsdorf, participated. An especially appealing example was submitted by Birdsall of Northampton which is illustrated, together with all the other 1894 bindings, in the 1994 catalogue.

The Doves Bindery was not represented. One binding came from Canada and rated special comment, as it was bound by Dawson Brothers of Montreal in buckskin, lined with birch bark and satin, and ornamented with the beadwork tag of a moccasin, with ermine tips, from the Rocky Mountains. In fact it looks more like a modern design binding than most of the others. The United States was represented by five bindings, all obviously influenced by the prevailing English tradition and one, by Henry Blackwell of New York, copying the Kelmscott Press title-page in a way very reminiscent of Cobden-Sanderson. From France there were eight examples, including those from Gruel, Lortic and Marius-Michel, and six from Germany. The French decoration is more restrained and, on the whole, appears more elegant than the English or American. More exotically, Algiers was represented by crimson polished goat bound by a "native binder", China by crimson figured silk and green silken brocade, and Denmark with the most elaborate (and expensive) binding, with a portrait of the Fair Jehane, from the firm of Imm. Peterson, but with the designer, forwarder and finisher acknowledged by name. India sent four examples, one of them of carved and pierced blackwood, while the Persian contribution was bound in papier maché covered with painted silver leaf. It is not surprising that the glittering array caught the eyes of Queen Victoria and Mrs. Rylands.

In the 1994 exhibition there were eighteen bindings from England, one from the trade firm of Bayntun

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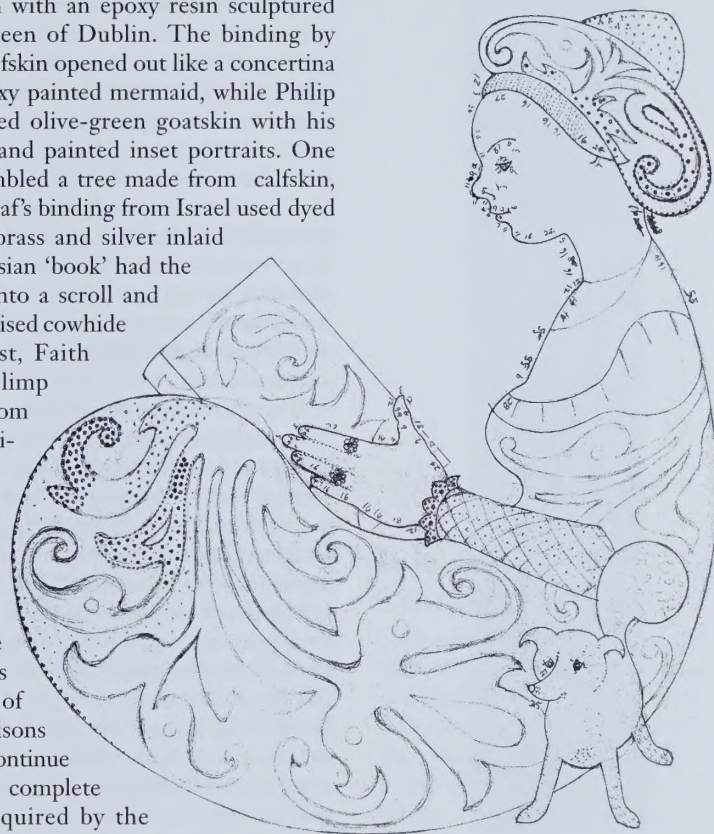
French and Italian Collectors and Their Bindings. (page 46)

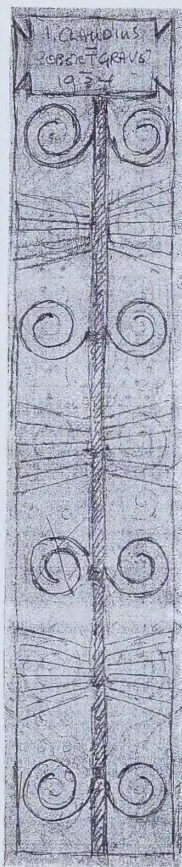
Drawing for the back cover design. It shows the working out of Italian ornaments and stippling on the lady's clothes, and a record of gouge numbers for curved lines.

and three from institutional binderies; the British Library, the Rylands Library, and the National Library of Wales, all with acknowledgement to individuals. The rest were individual efforts from most of the well known names; Philip Smith, Sally Lou Smith, Bernard Middleton, James Brockman, Ivor Robinson, Brian Robinson, Trevor Jones, Angela James, Flora Ginn and others. This time Canada had two entries, from Louise Genest of Quebec and Annegret Hunter-Elsenbach of Ottawa. Neither submitted a buckskin binding, preferring vellum with cork onlays patinated with gold, silver, copper and bronze with exposed sewing (Genest), and green goatskin with recessed panels, feathered onlays, and painted paper inlays (Hunter-Elsenbach). Michael Wilcox was not represented because, although he was asked, he did not have time to complete a binding. The United States sent nine bindings, including examples from Don Etherington, Deborah Evetts, Jan Sobota (the most unusual binding in the exhibition, being a sculptured woman's head covered with white buckskin and orange pigskin hair), and J. Franklin Mowery. The French contingent in 1994 consisted of four individual binders whose designs again seemed more restrained than their English and American counterparts. Two German bindings were shown, one of them an elaborate bright yellow vellum sculpture binding. Exotic bindings could come from anywhere in the world in 1994; emu feet leather with melaleucca bark panels from Australia (one of the two 1894 Australian bindings was in carpet snake skin), a 'whirl-

wind' scroll binding from China, and a terracotta puckered goatskin with an epoxy resin sculptured face from Des Breen of Dublin. The binding by Trevor Jones in calfskin opened out like a concertina to reveal a very sexy painted mermaid, while Philip Smith's was painted olive-green goatskin with his trademark maril, and painted inset portraits. One Greek entry resembled a tree made from calfskin, while Yehuda Miklaf's binding from Israel used dyed olive wood with brass and silver inlaid dots, and one Russian 'book' had the text transcribed onto a scroll and contained in an incised cowhide pouch. In contrast, Faith Shannon's cream limp vellum binding from Scotland was beautifully restrained, with one of Harry Brockway's wood engravings reproduced on the upper cover.

As a whole the 1994 exhibition is as impressive as that of 1894, and comparisons and contrasts can continue to be made as the complete collection was acquired by the Rylands Library. Not surprisingly, the





bindings of 1994 displayed more individuality than their predecessors, and certain other general differences are noticeable as well. The designs of the later bindings are more closely related to and reflect more expressively the text of the book. As Middleton also points out, there was a much greater use of sculptural effect in the 1994 bindings, which directly reflects the influence of the designer bookbinders in the countries from which most of the bindings came. Bernard Middleton strongly feels that the freedom of expression displayed by these bindings clearly demonstrates the vitality of the art and craft of contemporary bookbinding and he is surely right. Whether the 1994 exhibition was 'better' than that of 1894 is a matter of taste.

The Michael Wilcox exhibition of 1998 also clearly demonstrates the vitality of the art and craft of one person, and he was triumphantly part of another exhibition and catalogue produced in 1996/97. Three years earlier Henry Morris of the Bird & Bull Press published Bernard Middleton's *Recollections*, a charming and modest account of his life as a book restorer and binder. Marianne Tidcombe, the distinguished binding historian (and binder) who had written a foreword for *Recollections*, arranged with Robert Fleck of Oak Knoll Books to reserve twenty-five sets of sheets for fine binding and together they selected twenty-five binders to create bindings. The only stipulation was that each binding should utilize the technique of gold-tooling. One binder had to withdraw at a late date and was replaced by Bernard Middleton him-

self. Michael Wilcox took the gold-tooling instruction very seriously indeed and produced a magnificent designer binding of maroon goatskin with dark brown and green goatskin onlays. It was lavishly gold-tooled with a pictorial design showing, on the upper cover, Middleton working at his lying press, in his apron, with the tools of his trade and closed books around him. The lower cover displays the scholar Middleton in his library, in pajamas and dressing gown, with the open books of his extensive library around him, pictures and a pistol on the wall and the ubiquitous cat at his feet. This design also adorns the wrapped issue of the catalogue published by Oak Knoll Press in 1997.

Twenty-five Gold-Tooled Bookbindings: An International Tribute to Bernard C. Middleton's Recollections describes the twenty-five bindings, all illustrated, from eleven countries and this is the context in which Michael Wilcox practises today. Ten of the binders are from England, evidence that the country where designer bookbindings originated, still leads the way with the greatest number of significant practitioners of this craft. (In France, a quite separate tradition, exemplified by Paul Bonet and others, flourished between the two World Wars and continues even to the present without seeming to have much influence on the Anglo-American tradition: it is noteworthy that no French bindings were included in this exhibition, Daphne Beaumont-Wright's olive green goatskin binding is gold-tooled in an elaborate pattern depicting an open book of symbols enhanced by two blind-

tooled cats. James Brockman contributed a binding of scarlet goatskin featuring black onlays and positive and negative tools in three shades of gold, while Lester Capon's restrained dark green goatskin contains designs in gold and blind-tooling with coloured onlays concentrated on the spine. Flora Ginn chose terra-cotta goatskin with black and green onlays and intricate geometric gold-tooling, and John Mitchell used an abstract design of yellow onlays on bright green goatskin which are outlined in gold. Brian Robinson's binding of scarlet Niger goatskin is gold-tooled in a curvilinear symmetrical design that extends across both covers, and Christopher Shaw uses a vertical linear design of red stripes on black goatskin. Sally Lou Smith's striking design of vertical strips of brown and beige on black goatskin reveal behind them a gold-tooled radiant design. Ann Thornton also uses black goatskin as the basis for quadrilateral maroon designs that are gold-tooled.

Two bindings were commissioned from the United States. Don Etherington, who was trained in England, uses red, orange and yellow goatskin onlays, with gold-tooling, on black goatskin to create a horizontal design extending across both covers, while Frank Mowery, trained in Germany, contributes a light brown calfskin binding tooled in a horizontal design of letters in blind and gold.

Apart from Michael Wilcox, Canada is represented by Louise Genest who employs light brown goatskin with darker brown onlays and patented metallic onlays with gold-tooling to create a pleasing vertically de-

signed binding. Of the three Swiss bindings, that of Martin Jaegle incorporates dark red goatskin, onlaid with coloured paper panels and a bright red goatskin spine, Roland Meuter uses purple goatskin as a background for his gold-tooled geometrical zig-zag design across both covers, and Hugo Peller creates a diagonal design of gold-tooling on grey goatskin. August Kulcher, from Belgium, creates a gold-and blind-tooled geometrical design in two squares on black cowhide, and his compatriot Ghislaine Peleman uses black goatskin, vellum onlay and gold-tooling to display the outline of a man looking towards "the unknown future". Single bindings came from Spain, where Santiago Brugalla employs brown goatskin as a background for blind-and gold-tooled letters and vertical triangular columns; from Japan, where European trained Tini Miura creates an elaborate series of onlays of leather and abalone shell on dark green goatskin, with gold-tooling; from New Zealand, when Michael O'Brien gold-tools a portrait of Bernard Middleton in small dots across both covers of dark green goatskin; from Wales, where Julian Thomas creates a vertical linear design with gold-tooling and fillets on terra cotta goatskin; from Australia, John Tonkin uses ivory calfskin and pink and dark brown onlays for a horizontal design of bands which are gold-tooled; and from Geert van Dal of the Netherlands, who creates an intricate design of books on shelves extending from the spine in coloured onlays, gold-tooled, on black goatskin.

Opposite page:

I, Claudius. (page 62)

Sketch for spine design. It shows the date in Arabic figures, and scroll and codex symbols in balanced arrangement on either side of a unit-emblem pole. These symbols were changed to a staggered arrangement for the final design.

Bernard Middleton's own binding consists of yellow goatskin, jade-green inlays and black and dark green onlays, with two heavily gold-tooled vertical panels, through which can be seen the outline of a paring knife. He is the only binder to use inlays and the binding is a testament to his great technical skill as well as his sense of design.

The bindings in the Fisher Library exhibition have been chosen by Michael Wilcox as representing his career as a designer bookbinder from 1972 to the present. From the earliest, an imaginative exercise in minimalism which still perfectly expresses the spirit of the book, to the restrained but perfectly balanced blind-tooled Kelmscott *Chaucer* (1977), on to the exuberant letter forms of *Fra Luca de Pacioli* (1982) Wilcox creates new and exciting effects with every binding. His haunting masks on Poe's *Tales of Mystery and Imagination* (1978) are remembered by everyone who has seen them and the figures on *French and Italian Collectors and Their Bindings* (1984), a Frenchman and an Italian lady, seem perfect for the book whose covers they occupy. The flowers and vines on *A Dream of John Ball* (1991) echo the designs of Cobden-Sanderson and Douglas Cockerell, as do the free-flowing floral elements on *The Sonnets of William Shakespeare* (1994), except that this binding also contains outlines of human faces. Wilcox bindings are often pictorial and often contain the figures of men and women, as well as birds and animals. Examples include the *Song of Songs* (1992), with its evocative birds, *The Wind in the Willows* (1995) featuring the

charming figures of the principal characters in the story, and *Dracula* (1995), whose teeth and claws are menacing compared to the sweet young face on the opposite cover. Perhaps the most spectacular binding in the exhibition is the *Doves Bible* (1986), which because of its extent (5 volumes) fits together to form a long panel, creating a scene filled with energy and movement. To conceive and execute designer bindings of this complexity requires a combination of imagination and skill that amounts to genius. As he recounts in his description of *Fra Luca de Pacioli* Michael was commissioned by W. Thomas Taylor in 1981 to produce eleven bindings for a catalogue. A twelfth was added and the catalogue, beautifully designed by Tom Taylor and printed by David Holman, was published in 1985. Two of the bindings illustrated there are included in this exhibition.

All the bindings in this exhibition are described in detail by Michael Wilcox and his explanations demonstrate how carefully he considers the challenge of every binding he executes. He is clearly of the second school described by Edgar Mansfield; he reads the books and contemplates their meanings. If they are illustrated he considers the relationship between image and text. The design concept then emerges through a series of drawings and sketches, which are utilized to create the pattern papers used to actually work on the bindings. The individuals and institutions fortunate enough to own Wilcox bindings rightly consider them treasures; sources of permanent satisfaction and fulfilment.

A MEMOIR

IT OFTEN SEEMS to me a peculiar irony that I chose to become a bookbinder. Although having little aptitude for language, a poor general knowledge of literature, a tendency to be impatient, inattentive and a bit clumsy, I spend my days attempting to comprehend diverse texts and then working many, many hours to bind just one book by a process that demands unwavering attention and a very careful touch. And yet, for the past eighteen years, I have been making my living in this way, practising bookbinding as a creative craft. The road to my present occupation, however, was not an entirely smooth one.

I was born in Bristol, England and went to school there. But the schools I attended were little more than day care centres designed to keep children out of trouble until they were big enough to go to work. Instead of absorbing the meagre fare that our teachers daily offered, my pals and I worked hard to prove ourselves resistant to all instruction. We almost succeeded.

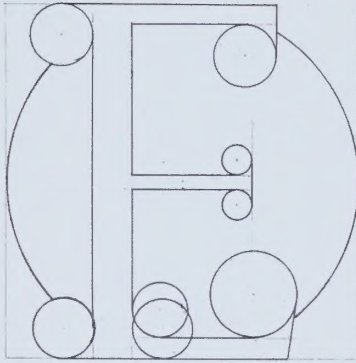
When I left school, on the day after my fifteenth birthday, just before Christmas, 1954, and then looked around for work, I did not have a particular occupation in mind. A friend suggested that I take the Master Printers' Examination, a procedure set up to select boys for apprenticeships in the printing trade.

After somehow passing the tests and then an interview, I was allowed to apply for any of three positions: photogravure printer, Monotype caster, or bookbinder.

I had read something about craft bookbinding in a boys' magazine and had got the impression that drawing was definitely involved. I loved drawing. Also, although not a keen reader of fiction, I did enjoy books that provided information on subjects that were of interest to me: drawing, painting, birds and nature. And I had noticed, too, that certain books were pleasant just to hold and to look at. So, with the thought that I soon might be making beautiful books, I decided to become a bookbinder.

Edward Everard, a well-known printer on a street at one time very well known for its printers, was the company in the old part of my home town to which I applied for an apprenticeship. Although Everard's is now defunct, its impressive ceramic front has been preserved as an architectural curiosity. In striking colours, images of Johann Gutenberg and William Morris are displayed among lettering and ornament that run from top to bottom of the building.

On an appointed morning and a little before the daily starting time of half past seven I entered, by a side door, Everard's grandiose structure. With great



Fra Luca de Pacioli .(page 44)
Drawing for the letter E.

anticipation I explained my business to the first person I met, a compositor. After telling me that my business, bookbinding, was a thing of the past, he directed me to the third floor. There, to my embarrassment, I found myself in a large room full of smiling women and giggling girls. It was St. Valentine's Day and my sudden appearance was taken as a providential joke. I was examined and fussed over like something just invented. To my relief, I discovered that I was not to begin work in this room but in another, a smaller one, adjacent to it.

For the next three years or so, under the care of Ernest Tovey, a very likable and capable craftsman, I learned to rule paper and, after it had been printed, bind it up into ledgers of all sorts and sizes. Some of the ruling patterns were very complicated and were occasionally done on handmade papers. Some of the bindings were surprisingly attractive, with russia bands and intricate vellum lacings. All these books were special orders individually designed to suit the various record keeping systems of a wide assortment of businesses. Although the books were devoid of literary or intellectual content, the bindings were generally better constructed than most of the ornately tooled ones that came out of the fine binderies of those days.

My mate, Ernest, who was of the old school and most scrupulous over both the neatness of his work and his personal appearance, was apt to fly into a rage when things went wrong. Broken lines and ink blots,

errors which I was supposed to detect as I watched the sheets emerge from the end of the ruling machine, were special bugbears. Blots could not be corrected. Broken or missing lines had to be repaired and some days I would spend hour after hour ruling lines by hand, using a pen held against a highly polished, dowel-shaped ruler.

An incident that seems amusing now but which was not considered funny at the time occurred during this early part of my apprenticeship. The girl that fed the sheets into the ruling machine liked to tease and lark around and I was happy enough to respond in kind. One day she lost her temper over something I had said. Snatching up the closest object to hand, she hurled it at me. I quickly ducked as a tin of ruling ink powder flew over my head and then burst open against the wall behind me. The air became filled with a fine, blue dust. Our mouths began to turn blue. Our eyes turned blue, and anything the least bit moist turned blue. There followed a considerable uproar during which threats to cancel my indentures were made. Eventually, the mess was cleared away and things began to calm down. But that night, as they walked home along the wet city streets, the workers from the third floor left behind them a trail of inky blue footprints.

Like many older craftsmen, Ernest believed that a binder could not be both a good forwarder (someone who makes the folded sheets into a bound book) and a good finisher (someone who titles and decorates the bound book). Therefore, all our work that required

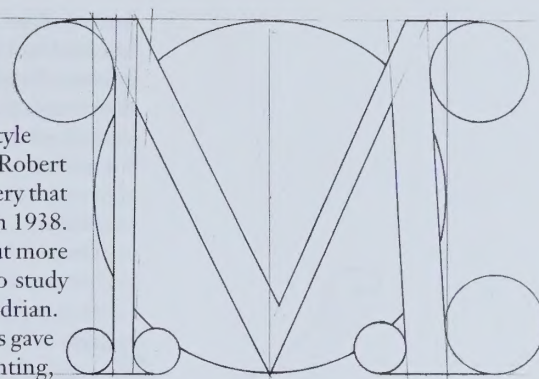
anything more than the most rudimentary finishing was loaded onto a handcart and taken to another bindery where the titling and decoration was done for us.

I was ashamed that we could not do these things for ourselves and my concerns were increased when, if the load was especially heavy, I was obliged to help Herbert, the company's porter, push the cart. The distance was not great but the area was hilly and some of the streets were cobbled, so that we often had hot work along the way. Herbert was a retired Royal Marine sergeant and, although usually a very humorous man, he would sometimes become disgruntled over his job, which he considered to be beneath him. But he would brighten up whenever we encountered young ladies and then in a loud voice would regale me with shocking stories of his amorous exploits throughout the ports of the world. I received a thorough outdoor education.

A very good arrangement that existed among many employers in those years was the allowing of daytime release to apprentices. For one day and usually two evenings a week, I was a student in the School of Printing at the Bristol College of Technology. Bookbinding classes were conducted by Ernest "Bill" Portnall, a kind, religious and charming man who had come from George Bayntun's, a well-known bindery and bookshop in Bath. He had a flair for telling tall stories but was an excellent finisher, with a good knowledge of bookbinding and books. Years later, to nobody's surprise, he became an Anglican priest.

In addition to teaching bookbinding subjects, Mr Portnall taught English to all the students at the School. In the binding classes, he did what he could to instruct us in design. His own style was strongly influenced by the work of Robert Rivière and Son, a famous London bindery that was incorporated by George Bayntun in 1938. Nevertheless, he was open minded about more modern attitudes and encouraged us to study the best designers, especially Piet Mondrian. Other teachers from various departments gave us lessons that related directly to printing, although I never did actually set type and print from it. This was probably just as well because with my almost dyslexic approach to spelling I would certainly have been ridiculed by the student composers.

But at Everard's the scene was quickly changing. The practice of taking on a variety of work, to be carried out through traditional and very time-consuming methods, was being replaced. Now the emphasis was on having everyone involved in the speedy production of the same, usually ephemeral articles. New methods and materials were required. Instead of arriving, as had been the custom, with bright white aprons every Monday morning, we began to turn up with what seemed like rags. Our aprons were encrusted with grimy synthetic glue that refused to be washed off. Ernest could not believe the way we



Fra Luca de Pacioli. (page 44)

Drawing for the letter M. Construction lines easily visible.

looked. The old wooden ruling machine was dismantled and our hand bookbinding work dwindled to almost nothing. I was put to work on a guillotine. Then more and more I spent my time setting up and running folding machines. The noise was incredible and the reek of the benzine used for cleaning the metal rollers would sometimes make me dizzy.

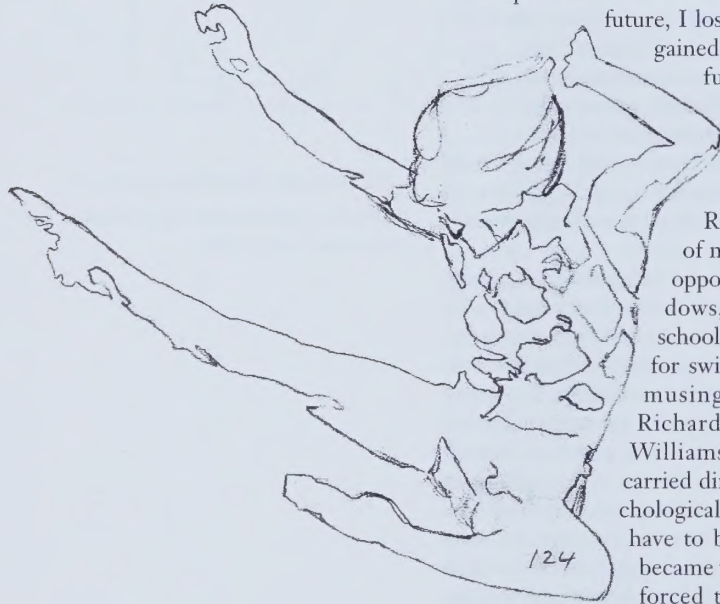
Despite Mr Portnall's rosy predictions for our future, I lost, never to be fully regained, my intense and youthful enthusiasm for the craft of bookbinding, and I abandoned all dreams of ever making beautiful books.

Retreating into the realm of nature, I would at every opportunity stare out of windows, during worktime or school examinations, to search for swifts and swallows while musing on the writings of Richard Jefferies and Henry Williamson. The newspapers carried dire warnings of the psychological crisis that would soon have to be faced as automation became the rule and we were all forced to adjust to a four- or even three-day workweek. I could hardly wait.

There were occasional bright moments, of course. Every year the school organized an outing to a place or event that was thought might be edifying to the students. In the spring of 1960, during my last term at the School, we visited an exhibition of bookbindings by Edgar Mansfield at the College of Technology in Oxford. It was April Fools' Day and some of us may have felt a little incredulous as we entered the room where the bindings were on display. The sight of Mansfield's completely non-traditional work had a disturbing impact on me; the bindings seemed both exciting and threatening. But I found it encouraging to discover that many of the books he had chosen to bind were in some way about nature. Even so, I believed that the gulf between his advanced ideas and my own tame thoughts was too wide to bridge. My fears seemed to be confirmed when, in the afternoon, Mansfield gave a lecture, "Creative Design and Art", which, to a large extent, went completely over my head.

Mansfield was friendly, appearing to be pleased that we had made the day's journey specially to see his work. We all had lunch together. My ignorance of the art world was such that I was surprised to hear, during a discussion on financial constraints, this apparently successful artist lament that the occasion of his exhibition had put him to the expense of buying a new jacket.

Any rekindled dreams that I developed as a result of that day's experiences were soon crushed beneath the pounding of Everard's machinery. But then a



miraculous thing happened. I found that merely by expressing my discontent and saying where I would rather be, the management saw fit to pack me up and send me to Bath, where, at George Bayntun's, I was to complete the sixth year of my apprenticeship. I was astonished. Why hadn't I complained sooner?

This transfer put some heart back into me. For a while I was quietly elated to find myself surrounded by piles of leather bound books, mostly with gilt edges and lots of gold tooling. Also enthralling were the thousands and thousands of finishing tools and the beautiful old blocking presses together with a general presence of intriguing paraphernalia. It was perhaps the best equipped fine bindery to be found anywhere. I eagerly looked forward to learning about these things. "How did George Bayntun acquire all this stuff?" I asked. "By buying out all those little binders that did too good a job," I was told. Yes, there was a lot to learn.

And I did learn a great deal. But after being at Bayntun's for a year I was still what seemed to be only half a bookbinder. As with most fine binderies, a functional and strict division of labour existed, so that I never did and, it appeared, never would do any finishing. Ernest had been right, it seemed, and now I could see why. I had to content myself with watching the finishers at work and asking questions. These observations on gold tooling, along with what I had learned on the subject at the School, were stored away, not to be put to any serious use until almost ten years later.

It was all very disappointing but I maintained that I didn't really care; fortunately, I had interests greater than bookbinding. Sometime after becoming a journeyman, rather than continue making the often slow train journeys to and from Bath every day, I chose to return to Bristol, to the very bindery to which I used to take Everard's work on a handcart.

The original Mr Ware of W. H. Ware and Sons came, I understand, from the famous Zaehnsdorf's in London. He set up in Bristol many years ago and his sons continued the business after him. But, as far as fine binding was concerned, the enterprise appears to have taken a mostly downhill direction. My work there consisted of binding technical journals, usually in buckram, for university libraries. The small workshop had its own way of doing things and, to my horror, I was expected to use very, very thick glue and many layers of heavy, course paper for lining up the spines of the books. During the one year that I spent at Ware's, there occurred only two diversions to relieve the monotony of the daily bind.

First, as the person who had recently arrived from the prestigious George Bayntun's, I was considered the best qualified to repair a 1611 King James Bible. I enjoyed the change. Second, and somehow for the same reason, I was selected as the man to go to the Bristol branch of the Bank of England and help put together papers that the Bank considered too sensitive to be allowed off their premises.

The Bank's officials must have been impressed to discover that it required separate visits from three

Opposite page:

The English Bible. (page 48)

Tracing from a photo of Rudolf Nureyev dancing. This figure served as a model for the angel on the front cover of the first volume.

people in order to bind one fairly simple-looking book: a woman to do the sewing, me to do the binding, and someone else to give the book its title. So, with a pot of hot glue in one hand and a small lying press on my shoulder, I strolled through the City's streets toward my new place of business.

In the Bank, it was entertaining to see trolley loads of pound notes being pushed around. A young woman was posted to watch over me, to make sure that I did not read the Bank's secret papers. She was a sweet but sleepy girl who had little interest in either me or my work. While I applied glue and paste to the Bank's so precious documents, she contentedly snoozed away the time in a nearby chair.

I was still living with my parents at that period and, like most binders employed in the trade shops, I did not have any work place of my own. With the hope of gaining access to binding equipment, I enrolled in evening classes in bookbinding at the West of England College of Art, so that I could practise some of the skills I lacked and maybe do a little binding for myself. As it turned out, not much binding was done, although I did do a lot of talking with the art students, thereby broadening my outlook on the book arts. Also, I signed up for the College's life drawing classes and began a flirtation with drawing the nude. Many years later this interest developed into a serious affair when I became a regular attendee in the life classes at Peterborough's Sir Sandford Fleming College.

An event that momentarily aroused my interest was an exhibition of bindings by members of The Guild of Contemporary Bookbinders, held at Foyles Art Gallery in London, in May 1962. Apart from Edgar Mansfield, all the exhibitors and their work were, if I remember correctly, new to me. On the homeward train journey, the bindings that remained in my mind longest were those done by Philip Smith. His use of feathered onlay in combination with gold tooling made a very forceful impression. But it was no good, I'd had more than enough of bookbinding and was almost desperate for an escape. When a friend wrote from Canada to say that there was an opening that summer for a junior position in the Life Sciences Division of the Royal Ontario Museum and would I be interested in applying for it, I leapt at the opportunity.

As I stepped off the gangway from the ship to the dockside in Montreal, I had no idea where I was going to find employment. It was August 1962 and, because of some misunderstanding, the Museum job that I had sought would not be available until the middle of the next year. In Toronto I searched around but found only temporary work. At one place I did machine ruling for a week. At another, which claimed to be a hospital for books, I lasted longer, receiving my discharge soon after Christmas, together with the owner's explanation that he felt I lacked sufficient dedication to the work. He was absolutely right because, with regard to the treatment of the books, it seemed

Opposite page:

The English Bible. (page 48)

Drawing for the angel on the front cover of volume one. The figure is derived from a photo of Rudolf Nureyev dancing.

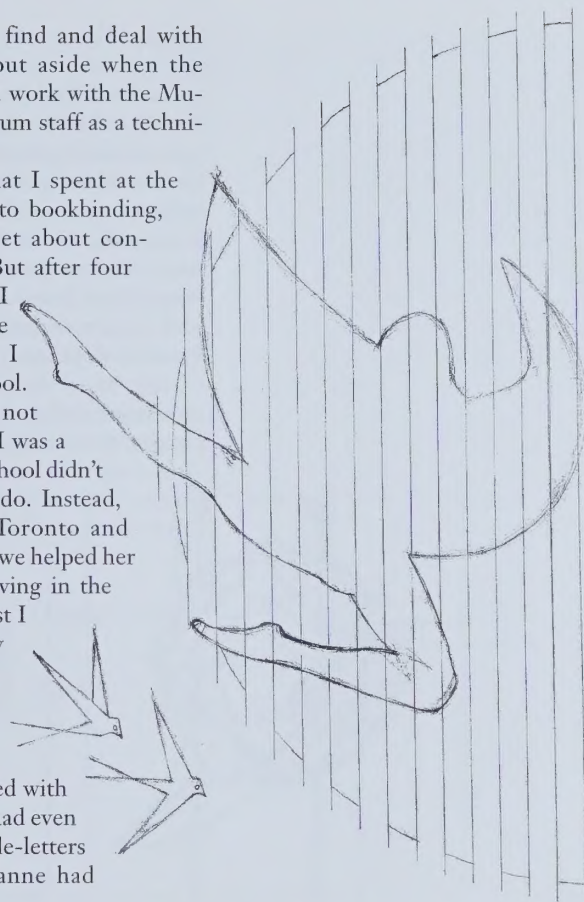
to me that his establishment was more like a slaughterhouse than a hospital.

I had met Robert Muma almost immediately after arriving in Canada, but he had been unable to help me then. Now he came to my rescue. On a short-day basis I worked with Bob in his little bindery at his home on Hazelton Avenue in Toronto. The arrangement suited me perfectly. It allowed me to start late, finish early and to take long lunch breaks, and it paid just enough to keep me going until the job in Life Sciences came along.

Robert Muma was a much more remarkable man than his quiet Quaker manner led people to suppose. Years before I met him he had established himself as a highly respected leather-craftsman. Later, he became a self-taught bookbinder, and if he failed to achieve the same success in that field as in his previous one, this had more to do with his ill health and lack of opportunities than with any want of ability. He was extremely good at inventing efficient ways of doing things. The technique he developed for the safe removal and replacement of fragile leather spines has not, as far as I know, been improved on in its fundamentals. Bob also had a deep and lasting affection for natural history, becoming, after his retirement, quite an expert on mosses. We got along together very well indeed and remained friends until his death over thirty years later. In terms of bookbinding, the important rewards I gained from working with him were seeing how to organize a one-man bindery, how and where

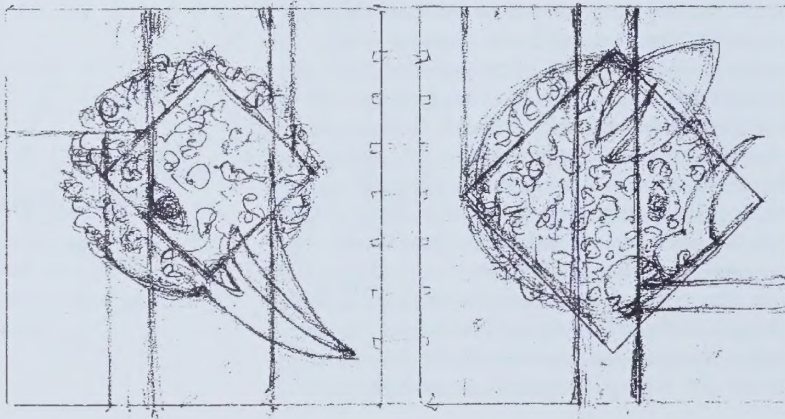
to buy materials, and how to find and deal with customers. But all this was put aside when the summer came and I began field work with the Museum and then joined the Museum staff as a technician.

During the happy years that I spent at the Museum I gave little thought to bookbinding, although I did at one point set about constructing a small lying press. But after four years of being a technician I realized that, in order to make any significant advancement, I would have to go back to school. My memories of school were not good and, besides, at this time I was a married man and so attending school didn't seem like the proper thing to do. Instead, my wife Suzanne and I left Toronto and moved to the Kawarthas, where we helped her parents run a general store. Living in the countryside was a delight. At last I was close to the Canada of my boyhood dreams. After almost three years of being store keepers, however, we decided that we were not well suited for the job. My mind was often occupied with thoughts of bookbinding and I had even started to cut some brass handle-letters (tools for titling books). Suzanne had



bought a loom and was already making articles for sale.

In the fall of 1969 we moved into a small house but continued to work part-time at the store. There was a twelve-by-fourteen-foot shed in our garden and all the following winter I worked to make it into a bindery — very plain but adequate. Finding enough binding equipment was difficult and when I opened for business in the spring of 1970 I still did not have a board cutter. Just as illustrated in Douglas Cockerell's well-known manual and as recently described in Bernard Middleton's *Recollections*, I used a heavy pair of sheet-metal shears, fixed to a bench, to rough cut the boards before trimming them with a binders' plough. But through hard hunting and good luck I



eventually acquired everything needed for binding books by hand.

Although I had no problem remembering the sequence of binding operations, after being away from the craft for almost seven years, I did have to learn all over again how to manipulate the tools and materials. Also, my English training had not prepared me for the unbelievable dryness of my workshop in the wintertime. A humidifier, layers of plastic film over the windows and damp cloths over the work finally brought the situation under control. Gradually I acquired work and Suzanne helped me by sewing books, working headbands and catching my misspelled titles.

After what seemed so many years of travelling, I was at last a whole bookbinder doing everything for myself. Also, I was surrounded by nature and happily married. The times that followed were often lean and my belief in creative craft as a worthy pursuit was often tested, so that I am now a cautious advocate of the craftsman's way of life. Nevertheless, I somehow endured and although there are still some frustrations, my work now is more interesting and challenging than I ever could have imagined back in those days, over forty years ago, when I used to help push the handcart from Everard's to Ware's.

Recollected Fragments of Ornament & Grotesque.
(page 52)

Initial sketch for cover design.

A FINE LIBRARY is the ideal setting for an exhibition of creative bookbindings, and so I am particularly happy that the first solo display of my work in Canada is taking place at the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library. My familiarity with this Library goes back a long way and I am grateful to the members of its staff for the generous and friendly support which they have always given me. And I am very grateful to the Friends of the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library for making the printing of a catalogue possible.

All the bindings shown here come from owners in North America. While it cannot be claimed that this selection demonstrates every way in which I bind books, I do believe that, with the displays of drawings and tools (innovatively arranged in the catalogue by Veronica Fisher), it does give a good coverage of the various methods I have used for creating decorative designs.

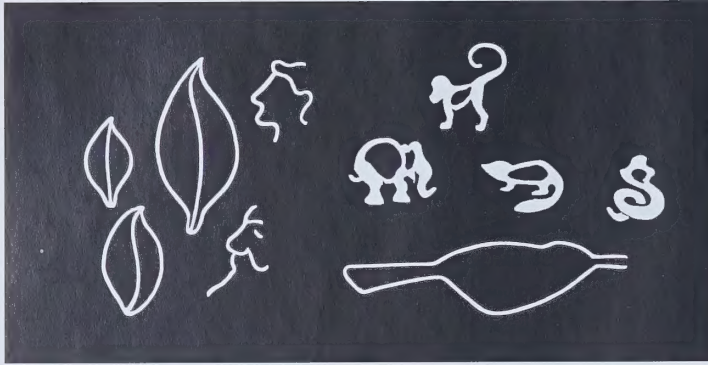
Although I am not overly concerned with producing new looks for my work, I do try to ensure that in

essence what I design comes out of my own thinking. In these designs my constant use of the familiar images of plants and animals and of the human face and figure is deliberate. These universal and easily understood symbols of primary objects serve to restate my conviction that it is important to remember what we are, where we belong and what is of permanent value. Also, I have made a very conscious decision to use the decorative techniques of gold tooling and coloured leather onlay, because I feel they best satisfy my need for a medium that gives a rich but practical means of expression to my ideas.

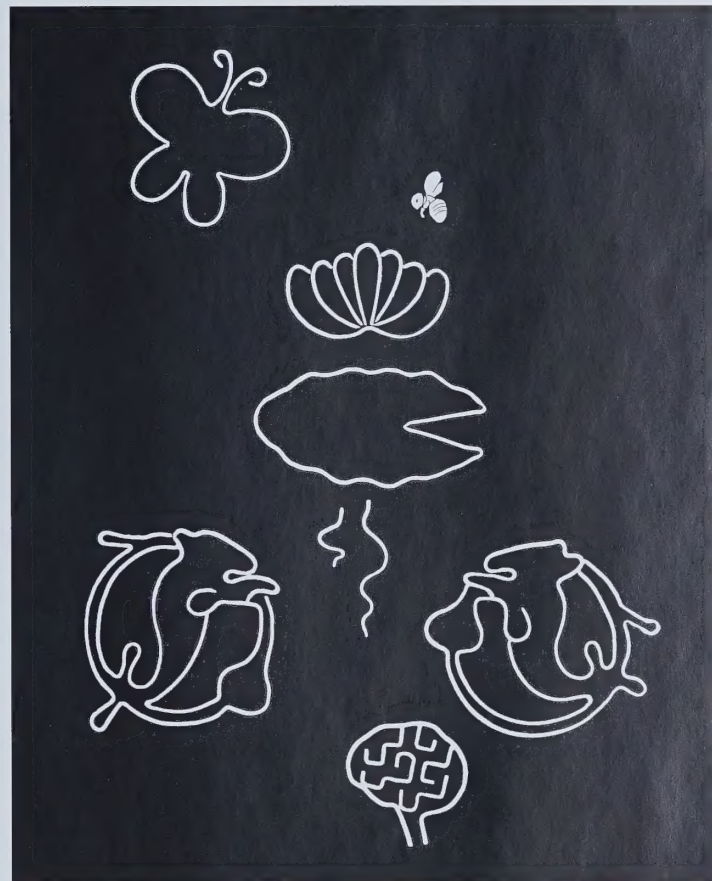
Working as a craftsman has taught me that it is nonsense to expect everyone to see things in the same way, but I hope that these bindings will at some level be found interesting and that they may give added entertainment to those who seek the pleasures of the book.

Michael Wilcox

IMPRESSIONS OF TOOLS CREATED BY MICHAEL WILCOX



IMPRESSIONS OF TOOLS CREATED BY MICHAEL WILCOX



EXHIBITION CATALOGUE

Note: Impressions of tools created by Michael Wilcox specifically for the binding illustrated are reproduced (actual size) in a design under the bibliographic description.

This represents my first effort at what today would be called a designer binding. It was bound under the guidance of E. W. G. Portnall, while I was a second-year and part-time book-binding student at the Bristol College of Technology.

The finishing was done in a rush, so that the binding could be entered in The Thomas Harrison Memorial Competition and exhibited at The Times Bookshop in London, in May 1957. It won no prizes, and in fact was an embarrassment because one of its headbands broke (both broken now) during the judges' examination. I had very unwisely used cane instead of the vellum normally used for headband cores.

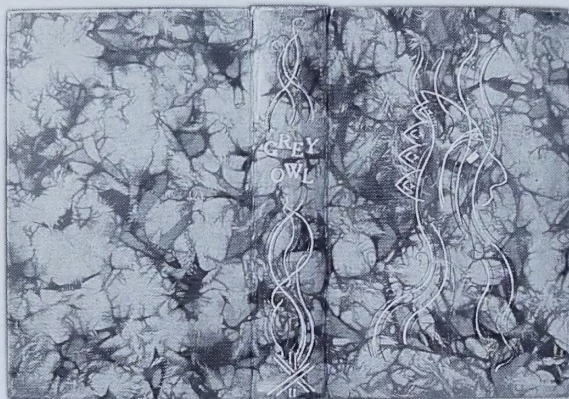
The edge gilding was not done by me. As was the common practice among binders in those days, I had the edge gilded by a professional gilder, in this

case the legendary Eric Ham of Bath. Also, I was not responsible for colouring the leather. The attractively stained and old-fashioned Spanish morocco used here was the product of a leather manufacturer.

Letterpress binding, as the binding of books to be read used to be termed, was not really my field at this time. I worked at stationery binding, making ledgers and blank books that were to be written in.

Today it pains me a little to look at this binding, to see its lack of skill and imagination.

Still, it does give me some fond memories of my fellow students and of our teacher, who so kindly gave me this first edition of a book that may have played a part in my decision to come to Canada.



WA-SHA-QUON-ASIN (Grey Owl) [Archibald Stansfeld Belaney]. *Tales of an Empty Cabin*. London: Lovat Dickson Limited, 1936.

Lent by Michael Wilcox.

Full Spanish morocco, with gold, silver and carbon tooling. 219 x 136mm. Bound in 1957.

RONALD SEARLE. *Filles de
Hambourg*. Paris: Jean-
Jacques Pauvert, 1969.

Lent by Richard Landon.

Full black goatskin, with gold
tooling. 215 x 137mm. Bound
in 1972.

At the time this book was bound I had been established as an independent bookbinder for about two and a half years. My work had consisted almost entirely of the repairing and rebinding of antiquarian books from dealers, collectors and a few institutional libraries within the Toronto area. Although many of these bindings were decorated with traditional ornamental gold tooling, only one or two had designs that might be described as directly concerned with the mood and content of the book.

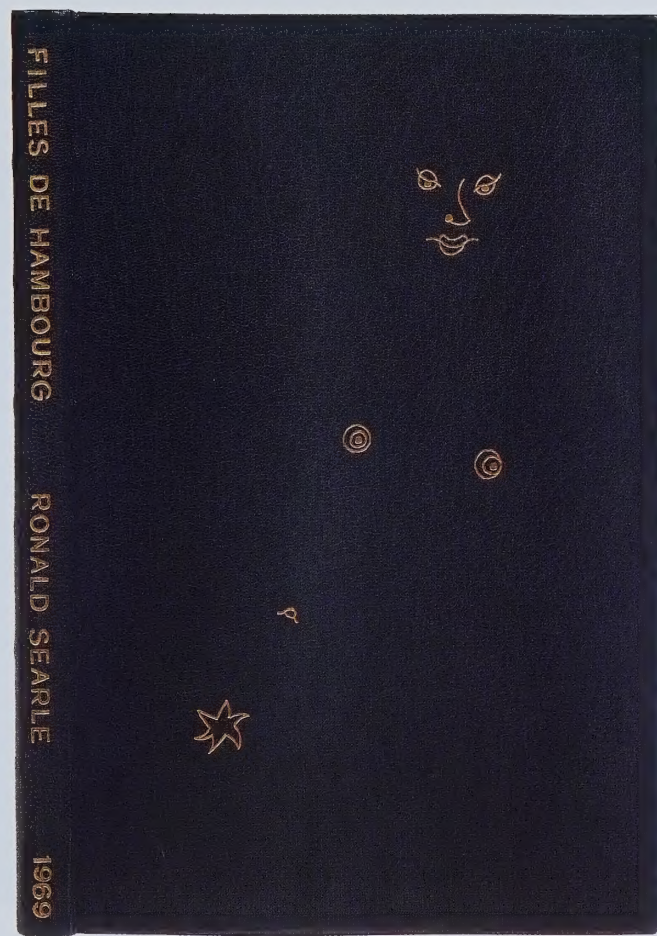
Like so much of my early work for collectors, this commission, from Kildare Dobbs, the Toronto writer and humourist, came through David Mason, when his bookshop was on Church Street. Mr Dobbs had given me a number of books to be bound, usually in a fairly plain, traditional style, but for *Filles de Hambourg* he wanted something a little special. On the title page of this copy, and in addition to an inscription to Dobbs, Ronald Searle had drawn yet another delightful example of the revealingly posed girls that were reproduced on the pages that followed.

Books such as this, which are primarily concerned with the work of an impressive illustrator, can be especially daunting: any art work I do may be unfavourably compared with that in the book.

Fortunately, the materials and techniques of my medium are usually very different from those used by the illustrator, and so, when the two kinds of work are compared, this difference sometimes — but only sometimes — helps to hide the less advanced state of my artistic efforts. I probably had a little of the above worry in mind, along with the belief that I should somehow continue to keep prices low, when I decided to make my design as brief as decently possible.

The book's title, lettered on the spine, was done using a set of handle letters that I cut before returning to bookbinding. These, along with two other sets I made, were soon abandoned as being too crude. But the cutting of the letters served as the practice with graver and needle file that was essential for the making of the various decorative tools that came later.

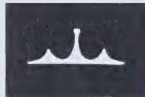
Looking at this binding again for the first time in over twenty-five years (I had no photo and the pattern paper was lost), I feel that I was indeed wise to keep the design simple. I notice, too, that the covering could have been better and that the tooling, although solid enough, could have done with less of that dashed-off look which is the sign of the binder anxious to get the work out.



GEOFFREY CHAUCER. *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*.
Hammersmith: Kelmscott
Press, 8 May 1896.

Lent by Bridwell Library,
Southern Methodist
University, Dallas.

Full beige goatskin, with
double raised bands and blind
tooling. 441 x 311mm. Bound
in 1977.



When Roderick Brinckman of Monk Bretton Books in Toronto commissioned me to bind this magnificent book, he asked only that I title it simply “Kelmscott Chaucer” and that I not use any gold tooling.

Something traditional in tawed skin, perhaps pigskin, seemed to be called for. But I had no such skins in stock and, as it was hoped that the binding would be ready for an approaching New York Book Fair, I didn’t feel that I had sufficient time to order skins from England — a lengthy procedure in those days and, as I saw it then, a pretty risky one. However, I did have a pair of olive Nigerian goatskins that looked more brown than olive. Neither skin was big enough to cover the book, so I put the two together, joining them along what is now the broad line nearest the spine on the back cover.

A simple, small tool was cut in brass and used in a manner commonly employed for making up leafy patterns on blind-tooled bindings in the late Middle Ages. Four impressions produced the negative outlines around the oak-like leaves that occur in the large panels on the covers, and six impressions of the same tool helped to form the terminal ornaments for alternate bands across the spine.

For the roundel on the front cover I attempted to make a design that would be compatible with Burne-Jones’s illustrations. Chaucer’s appearance was based on the way he is portrayed in the famous Ellesmere manuscript. But in order to capture something of both his serious and humorous nature, I

placed three rosary beads in his left hand, while allowing his left foot to kick out in a carefree attitude.

In my effort to finish this binding in plenty of time before the Book Fair, I somehow got the lattice work of lines on the front panel completely out of position. After the hand-wringing and hair-pulling were over, there was nothing for it but to replace the affected area with a new piece of inlaid leather.

The making of this binding, along with its eventual sale at the New York Book Fair, aroused a response that astonished me: Richard Landon arrived from Toronto to do an article for *Books in Canada*, which included a photo of me holding up the book; to advertise the forthcoming sale in New York, Roderick Brinckman had a small leaflet printed that also contained a picture of the binding; at the New York Book Fair, where a number of people expressed a liking for my work, Nico Isreal, the Dutch bookseller and publisher, saw the binding and by way of appreciation sent me a complimentary copy of his just-published translation and facsimile of Dirk de Bray’s seventeenth-century instructions on bookbinding; a man in Florida contacted me to say that he hoped we might meet, because he was writing his Ph.D. thesis on Chaucer, had seen a photo of me with the Kelmscott book, and that he and I looked remarkably alike. And in the middle of all this, Roderick, true to his always kind and thoughtful dealings with me, insisted on paying quite a lot more for my work than I had asked.



Looking back now, I realize that much of the excitement resulted not from any special talent I possessed but that it came from the general resurgence of interest in bookbinding that was taking place in North America at that time. Even so, I am still grateful for the attention I received, for it helped to introduce me to those dealers and collectors in America who have since become the main purchasers of my present-day bindings.

EDGAR ALLAN POE. *Tales of Mystery and Imagination*. Illustrated by Harry Clarke. London: Geo. Harrap & Co., 1919.

Lent by The Lilly Library,
Indiana University.

Full navy goatskin, with a
back-pared onlay of bright tan
leather and gold tooling. 277 x
226mm. Bound in 1978.

This was another commission from Monk Bretton Books and, again, the prospect of a book fair — only in Boston this time — led to the work having to be hurried in its final stages.

The horror-story genre has never much appealed to me, so when I came to make my design for this unhappy book, instead of attempting to become involved with the intricacies of Poe's grisly art, I concentrated on trying to create an image that would present the ideas of horror and the fantastic in a simple but forceful way. Harry Clarke's remarkable style of illustration had a strong influence on my decision to use only gold dots for outlining and decorating the three masks.

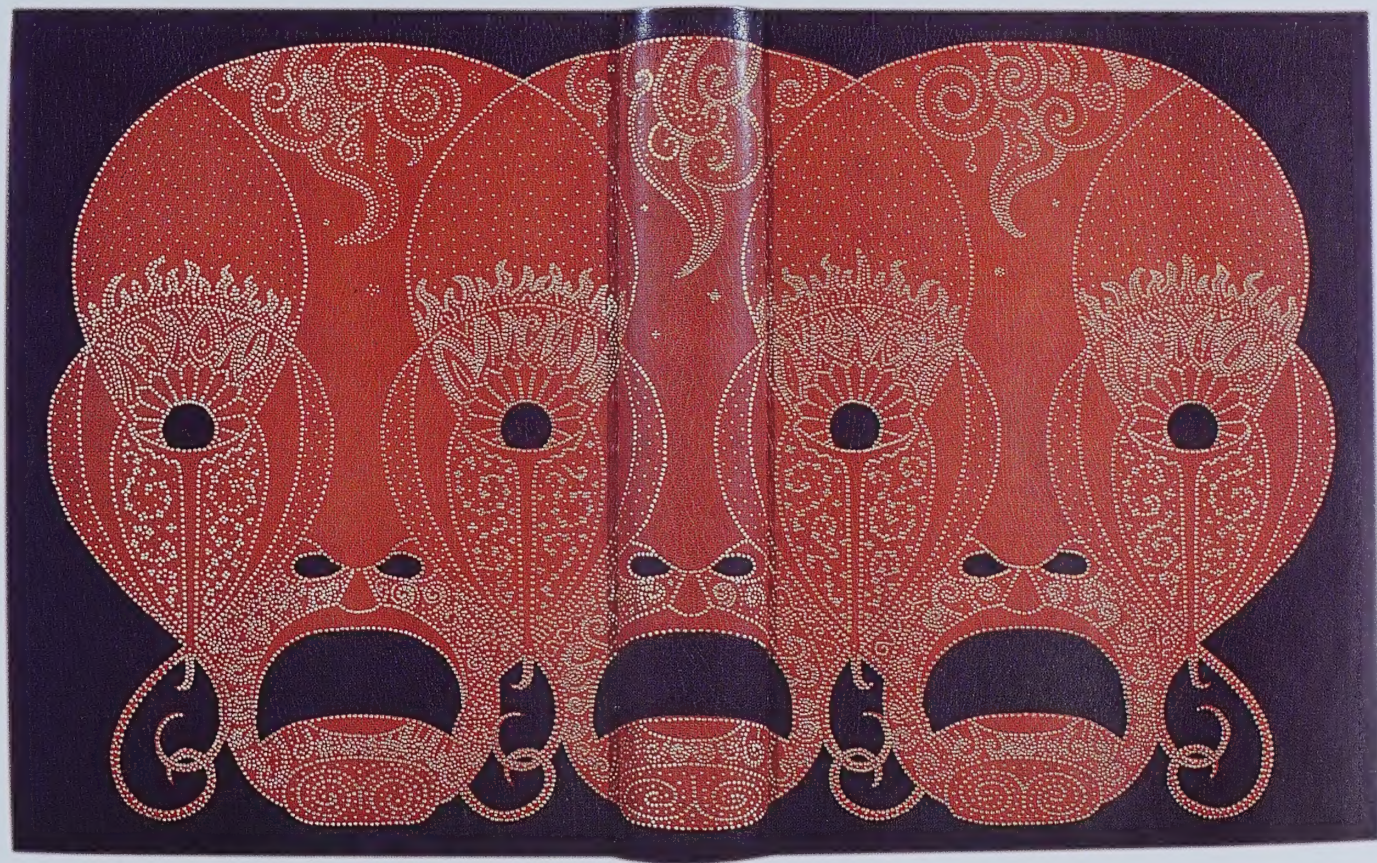
A fair amount of the tooling was done without the guidance of a pattern paper, and this may help to explain why there are so many poorly-spaced and out-of-line tool impressions. Today I would want every dot in place. But the results might not be any better, as I have noticed how, on certain old bindings, the irregular positioning of tools can add charm and energy to the design. Some effort was made to correct the distortion that occurred where the design had to follow the curvature of the spine. The binding was, I believe, the first on which I did not include a title — a bold step for me in those days.

The Poe was completed on time and taken to the book fair, where it was said to have caused something of a stir. There was even a report that two dealers had bitterly wrangled over which had first asked to buy it.

Over the years the binding has become quite well known in North America and is now probably regarded as my most popular. It has been shown in exhibitions and in 1994 it appeared as the principle image on a poster that was put out at the time of the International Festival of Authors in Toronto.

When today I think about the success of this binding, my pleasure is alloyed with a sense of frustration. I remember how quickly and effortlessly the idea came for the design, directly out of my imagination, and how, believing that a thing so easily achieved could not be of much worth, I then spent hours trying to come up with some alternative. Yet other designs, over which I have toiled for many days and which I know to be better than the Poe design, have, to my annoyance, not received the same success.

Nevertheless, in 1978, the enthusiasm shown for this binding represented to me a long-hoped-for event. It allowed me for the first time to imagine seriously that someday I might indeed earn my living entirely from creative bookbinding.



WILLIAM THOMPSON. *Sickness,
A Poem in Three Books.*
London: R. Dodsley, 1745.

In the collection of the
Thomas Fisher Rare Book
Library.

Full dark green goatskin, with
raised bands, coloured leather
onlays and gold tooling. 243 x
201mm. Bound in 1980.

For about five years, up to the middle of 1981, the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library employed me to restore a collection of antiquarian books on medicine and science. The work consisted of the routine repairing and rebinding of books that, for the most part, were in original or old-style leather bindings.

The medical books, which formed the majority, were particularly interesting, but they tended to induce melancholia when browsed through on a daily basis. Also quite depressing on a daily basis were those books of the late Victorian period which contained brittle paper that was ready to turn to dust. And so, after years of handling disease and decay, I was more than happy to take up Richard Landon's suggestion that, as a conclusion to the restoration project, he should give me a book of poetry on which I might do a special binding.

Although it does have a happy ending, Thompson's long poem, filled with despair and heavy symbolism, was not, in my opinion, the kind of stuff to raise one's spirits. What I felt I needed, and the book needed, was a bit of cheering up. The lobe-shaped onlays around the edges of the covers provided handy compartments in which to display my light-hearted treatment of the various characters, episodes and symbols referred to in the text. Lacking suitable ornamental tools, I brightened up the remaining spaces by using gouges (curved tools) and dots to make eighteenth-century-style flowers and leaves.

When, in 1970, I started bookbinding on my own, I signed my bindings very discreetly, usually with a faint carbon impression at the bottom of a flyleaf. But some years later, after receiving complaints from dealers who could not find my name on my bindings, I began to sign boldly in gold all my more elaborate works, frequently on a rectangular leather onlay that formed a sort of binders' ticket on the turn in of the back cover. The dealers loved it. On this occasion, however, as I was really an employee of the Library and not an independent, I hid my signature among the tooling of the main design.

The binding seemed to please Richard, although I recall that there was at least one member of the staff who felt I had applied my levity with a little too much freedom. I did not mind, I was on my way out and preparing to experience the life of a bookbinder who lives entirely by his commissions.

The years I spent at the Library were very important to me because, apart from the satisfaction of receiving a regular salary, I was able to study closely many styles of old bindings. Now, looking at my binding on *Sickness*, I am reminded of those interesting days at Fisher, and of all those infirm but fascinating books that I attempted to nurse back to working order.



T.E. LAWRENCE. *Seven Pillars of Wisdom: A Triumph*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Doran & Company, Inc., 1935.

Lent by David Mason.

Full tan goatskin, with raised bands, blue leather onlays and gold and blind tooling. 257 x 193mm. Bound in 1981.



After deciding to work exclusively on creative bindings, I received this well-known and very remarkable book as a commission from David Mason.

Financially, I was on pretty shaky ground in those days, and I can remember how very impressed I was when I read somewhere — maybe in Robert Graves's *Lawrence and the Arabs* — that, to keep it safe, Lawrence had buried a whole shipment of gold issued to him by the British Government and then had not been too upset when later he discovered he could not find the place where it was hidden.

The gold may have been on my mind as I sought inspiration for this design because I ended up with a lot of things that looked like gold ingots floating around. They form a map of Arabia and surrounding countries on the front cover, and they also become part of the headgear shown in the lower half of Lawrence's silhouette. On the back cover, they help to form the continuation of the front cover's vortex, which was intended to give the impression that it is passing through the closed book.

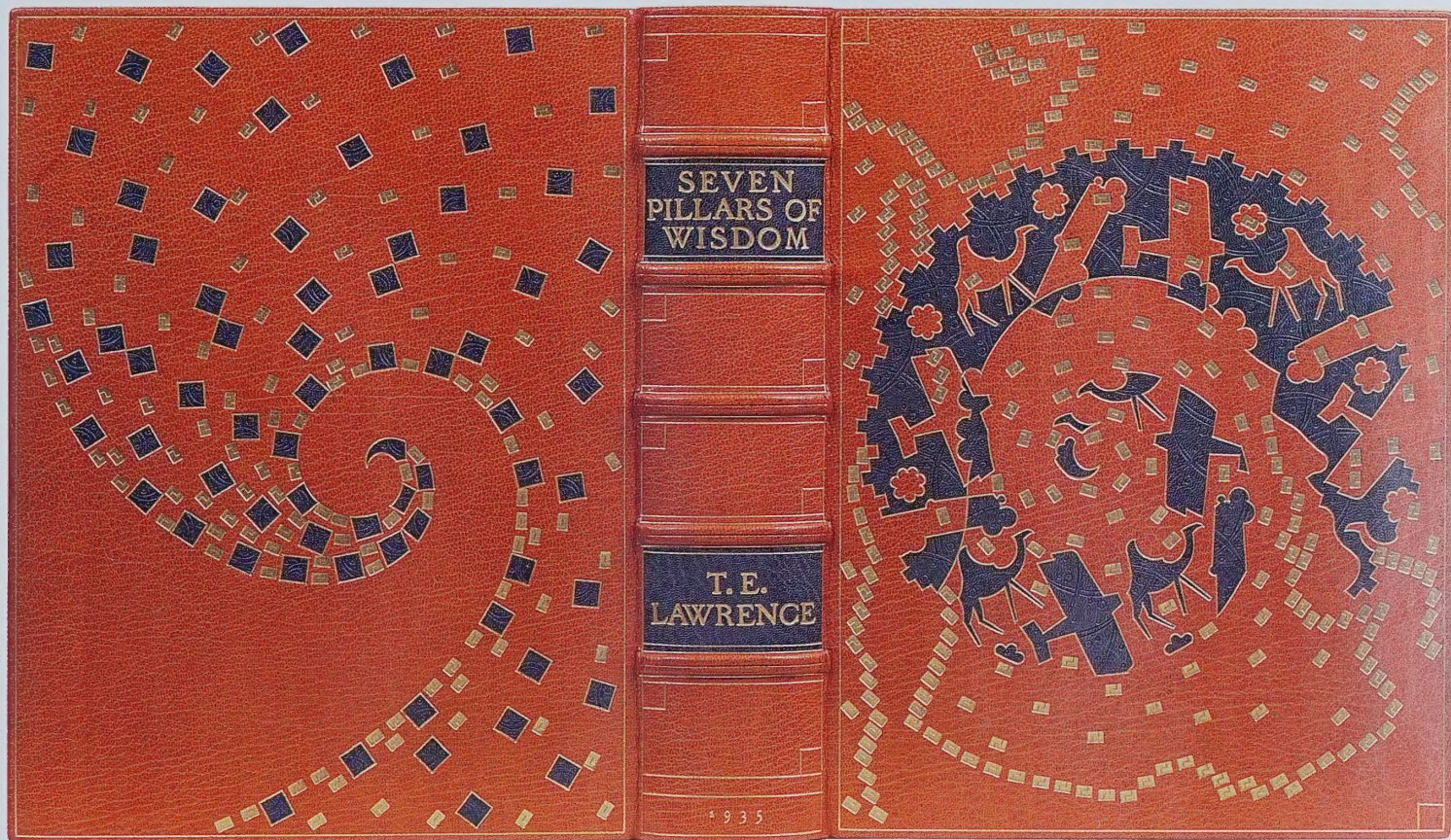
A major problem I encountered when we moved to the countryside was that I no longer had quick

access to a good reference library. Among the books available to me I could not find a picture of Lawrence in profile, so I had to rely on my imagination when it came to drawing an outline of his face. Kind friends have claimed that they recognize Lawrence in the image.

The design's ornamental treatment was based on Art Deco, which, with its mechanical look, seemed right for suggesting the new kinds of machines that Lawrence helped to introduce to the desert and which in various forms continued to hold his interest until long after the First World War.

Given the binding's Art Deco style of decoration, the flexible raised bands on the spine may seem an anachronism. But Lawrence was also attracted by old and traditional ideals, and he enjoyed owning the kinds of fine private press books that often had raised bands.

And as for my financial situation today? Well, I'm still quite impressed by that story about the missing gold.



J. F. LANSDOWNE. *Birds of the West Coast. Volume One.*
Toronto: M.F. Feheley, 1976.

Lent by Countess Aline
Dobrzensky de Dobrzenicz.

Full light tan goatskin, with
back-pared coloured leather
onlays, gold tooling and blind
blocking. 371 x 260mm. Bound
in 1981.

The very first book that I remember buying for myself when young was *The Observer's Book of British Birds*, a pocket book containing tiny reproductions of paintings by Thorburn and Keulemans. As my interest in birds and nature developed, other bird books were acquired and my fondness for bird illustrations grew.

When I came to Canada, thirty-six years ago, I had hoped to work in the Department of Ornithology at the Royal Ontario Museum but ended up in the Department of Mammalogy instead. However, I did marry the Ornithology Department's secretary. One day my wife told me about a visit to the Bird Room by a well-known bird artist who had arranged to borrow study skins for his work. I knew his name, for I had seen his art soon after my arrival in Toronto, where, on Bloor Street, I discovered an exhibition of superb bird paintings by Canada's Fenwick Lansdowne.

It was a delight for me to work on this book, a commission handled by Monk Bretton Books for John Galvin. But Mr Lansdowne's art, which seems to combine the decorative genius of John James Audubon with Josef Wolf's remarkable facility for bringing a bird to life, was not something I was about to try to emulate.

For my design I attempted to suggest "Birds of the West Coast" as a collective idea, an aerial view of

sea, coast, land, and birds. To represent sea birds, I chose the sometimes too abundant but generally very coastal gull. Their shapes fitted in nicely with the waves within a wave that sweeps up against the West Coast. The coastline, done in gold, was an exercise in economy of effort: all curved lines were changed to straight ones, thus producing a pattern easier and quicker to tool. The land area was presented as a positive/negative image, silhouetting both deciduous and coniferous trees. Land birds were represented by the flycatcher, an arboreal bird that also inhabits open places. The "picture" was framed by a single gold line, and the unseen artist was symbolized by the blind (hard to see!) impression from a linoleum cut made in the shape of an eye and placed in the curve of the wave, which itself looks like the head of a bird of prey. The gull tool, cut for a previous binding that had not been too successful, helped both to balance the design and give some extra swirl to the water.

All the onlays (pieces of thin material) for this design were attached to the covering leather before the book was bound. The back of the covering leather was then pared level, so that the onlays at the front became flush with the surface of the surrounding leather. This technique, of which there are only a few examples here, is called back paring and is said to have been invented by that singular bookbinder, Philip Smith.



SIR THOMAS MALORY. *The Noble and Joyous Book Entytled Le Morte Darthur* Chelsea: The Ashendene Press, May 1913.

Lent by Bruce W. Hubbard.

Full maroon goatskin, with double raised bands, coloured leather onlays and gold tooling. 356 x 280mm. Bound in 1981.



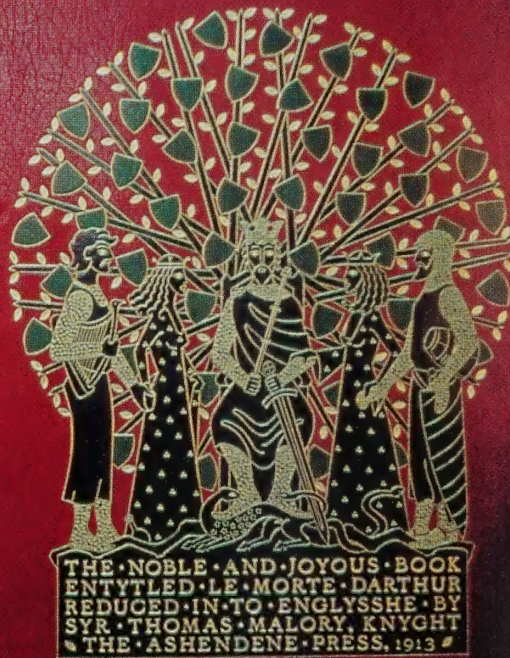
It is always a special pleasure to work with books made in the tradition of the great private presses. The handmade papers, the beautiful printing and the dedicated craftsmanship that go into their making give to me a deeply felt sense of inspiration. But alas, when it comes time to create designs for such books, that inspiration often roguishly disappears.

With this commission from Monk Bretton Books I tried hard to keep in step with the neo-medieval-cum-Italian-Renaissance style which St. John Hornby so lavishly applied to Malory's work. To deal with all the convoluted events of this marvellous tale would be impossible; therefore, in my design I referred only to Arthur in his glorious prime and then to the doleful passing away of his kingdom.

On the front cover, to Arthur's left, stand Guinevere and Lancelot and, to Arthur's right, Isode and Tristram. The shields and branch-like lances, symbolizing the Knights of the Round Table, grow out of and encircle Arthur's throne, which itself is part of a mature tree. On the back cover, the tree is in ruin, but its leaves help to form the vision of the Holy Grail witnessed only by Galahad, Perceval and Bors. Old and dead, Arthur lies beneath them, amongst the rubble of shields and broken lances.

I recall how I prepared for this commission by reading, from a paperback copy, the whole of *Le Morte Darthur*; and then how, with schoolboyish enthusiasm, I delved into chain mail and helmets and weapons and heraldry until, as sometimes happens, my notes contained enough material for a dozen bindings.

A few years before, I had come across the delightful illustrations done by Pauline Diana Baynes for J. R. R. Tolkien's *Farmer Giles of Ham*, and I believe that something of their influence can be seen in the figure of young Arthur, especially in his feet and in the folds of the costume around his knees. The remaining figures I made up as best I could, using a style that would fit in with the Ashendene illustrations but which was also very much dictated by my then somewhat novice status with line and gouge. I felt that I was back in the days when Katherine Adams, whose designs I so greatly admired, and the famous craft binderies used to tackle this subject. It was all a lot of fun.



STANLEY MORISON. *Fra Luca de Pacioli of Borgo S Sepolcro*. New York: The Grolier Club, 1933.

Lent by The Grolier Club.

Full black goatskin, with broad bands, coloured leather onlays and gold tooling. 321 x 211mm. Bound in 1982.

Early in 1981 W. Thomas Taylor, from whom I had already received a few commissions, called me up and asked whether I would be interested in doing ten bindings, each on a different title, for a catalogue that he would produce. I was very interested. Also, I felt very flattered. But I had serious doubts about whether I could successfully design and bind that many books in the time frame necessary for making the project worthwhile to him. I had a lot of commissions on hand, so Tom agreed to delay the venture until the next year. By June of 1982 I was at work on the first binding for Tom's project, and by the middle of September I had completed the third binding, *Fra Luca de Pacioli*.

I have heard certain people complain about bindings with letter designs on them, but I have always loved letters and I find them very appropriate for bindings, provided, as in this case, they have relevance to the book's content. Fra Luca's theme was that squares and circles make the proper basis on which to construct letters, and it suited me well to use letters, squares and circles as my own theme when making the design for this very attractive book. The letters reproduced in Morison's treatise were not all of the same height or proportions, so, lacking any technical equipment that might correct this, I redrew many of the ones I needed, often using the methods Fra Luca had suggested.

For a long time now many progressive binders have been avoiding the use of anything looking like "trim" in the form of panels or borders or the line

that, in much traditional work, runs around the very edges of the covers. Perhaps it is felt that these devices restrict the flow of the artistic imagination. I have ignored such fears and continue to use these old conventions wherever they seem to work.

When, as here, a binding has a "tight back" (a spine with the covering material completely attached to it, so that the material must flex and become concave when the book is opened), I prefer not to do any elaborate tooling on the spine. Should the leather need repairing someday, the binder who must do the work will surely bless me.

I shall remember this binding as the one that gave so much trouble with the finishing. At the time of doing the gold tooling I was experimenting with a new mixture for glaire (adhesive for gold leaf). As usual, I was in a bit of a hurry and by accident I must have added a double (perhaps triple!) dose of glycerin to my formula. After hours of frantically struggling to mend my abominable tooling, I peered through a magnifying glass and discovered that, instead of being firmly stuck to a hard, smooth surface, the leaf was sitting on top of a sticky, rubbery cushion. All the gold tooling already done had to be carefully and thoroughly washed off, and all impressions already glaired up, carefully cleaned out. Fresh glaire was made. But to be any good, new glaire must stand over night at the very least, and so more time was lost.

However, much worse things have happened — things that I cannot say. One thing I can say openly is that today I hardly ever add glycerin to my glaire.



A. R. A. HOBSON. *French and Italian Collectors and Their Bindings Illustrated from Examples in the Library of J. R. Abbey*. Oxford: Printed for Presentation to the Members of the Roxburghe Club, 1953.

Lent by the National Library of Canada.

Full tan goatskin, with back-pared coloured leather onlays and gold and white gold tooling. 337 x 290mm. Bound in 1984.

Hobson's hefty volume was the ninth book I bound for a catalogue of my bindings that was to be published by W. Thomas Taylor. In a letter to Tom, I wrote,

My design for this binding comes partly from those strange figures that one sees emerging from various bits and pieces of ornament in early illuminated manuscripts and partly from sixteenth-century ornaments used in French and Italian bindings. The sixteenth-century costumes worn around the upper regions of the two collectors are intended to help identify them: the Frenchman with his flat hat, ruff and cape and the Italian lady with her turban and off-the-shoulder dress.

The technique of using repeated dots or other small shapes is an old favourite among bookbinders. Dots free the designer from the limitations imposed by a lack of appropriate finishing tools. Dots can be used to form lines and shapes of all sorts and to produce areas of stippling in a wide range of patterns of varying density and complexity. In gold tooling, dots act as good reflectors, their many angled surfaces helping to give light and life to the appearance of the design and the leather. The ease with which eye-catching designs can be created makes the use of dots very tempting to the binder. And I have been tempted and have used repeated dots or small squares as major elements in many of my designs. Also, dots can begin to drive a person quite...

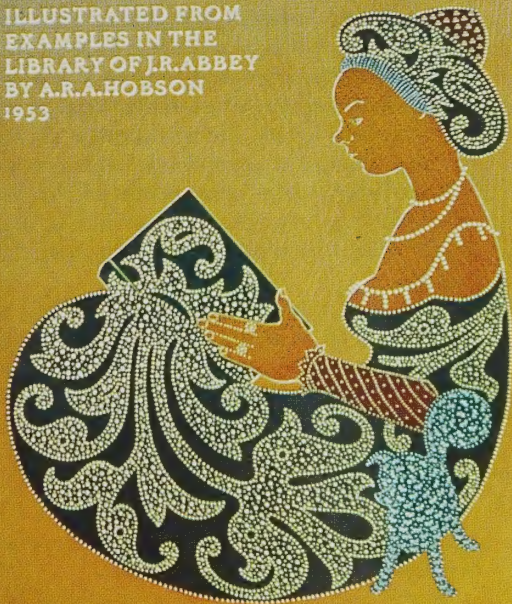
Another technique used by fine binders and which replaces or acts as a counterpoint to gold is the use of silver tooling. To prevent tarnishing, silver tooling must be protected, usually with varnish.

It was some time before binding the Hobson book that I was sold, by a dealer in metal leaf, my first pack of white gold as a replacement for silver. The dealer assured me that, being a mixture of both silver and gold, the leaf would not tarnish. I used the white gold for part of the design on a fairly elaborately tooled binding. Not until the book had been sent away and then resold did I discover by chance that some other tooling I had done at the same time and kept in my workshop was turning from silver to pale gold. The silver component had faded leaving only the gold showing. From then on I varnished all white gold tooling. Palladium leaf, which really does not — they say — tarnish, is what I now use in place of silver and white gold. But somewhere somebody has a binding of mine that used to have gold and silver tooling but which now probably has gold and pale gold tooling.

After the Hobson binding, I did two more books for Tom's project, making a total of eleven bindings commissioned by him. Another binding was purchased from Monk Bretton Books, and all the bindings were then illustrated in a limited edition catalogue, *Twelve Bindings: Michael Wilcox*, designed and published by W. Thomas Taylor, in 1985.

When I agreed to accept the proposal for making the catalogue, I did so mainly because I needed the

ILLUSTRATED FROM
EXAMPLES IN THE
LIBRARY OF J.R. ABBEY
BY A.R.A. HOBSON
1953



FRENCH AND ITALIAN
COLLECTORS AND
THEIR BINDINGS



commissions, but had no idea what the catalogue would look like — it might be awful. Had it never materialized, I probably would not have been too upset and still would have been thankful to Tom for all his support. So, when one very bright day a

package arrived from Austin, containing copies of a beautifully produced book with my name in big letters on the title page, I was overwhelmed.

Thank you, Tom, thank you!

The English Bible. Five volumes. Hammersmith: The Doves Press, 1903.

Lent by Bruce W. Hubbard.

Full goatskin, each volume in a different colour (green, tan, chocolate, blue, and red), with coloured leather onlays and gold and blind tooling. 331 x 234mm. Bound in 1986.

As I looked through the beautifully but plainly printed volumes of T. J. Cobden-Sanderson's *magnum opus*, my heart sank. There were the sacred words and there was Cobden-Sanderson's ascetic art. They sat together squarely on the pages, seeming almost like a rebuke to any binder who had the impertinence to meddle with them. But I remembered that Cobden-Sanderson himself was once a bookbinder, and that Bruce W. Hubbard, who knew my work and who had asked me to bind this book, did not want simply to replace the old plain bindings with new plain ones. Having doubts would never do. I thought I had better press on.

It was obvious what was meant, but the words "The English" in the title bothered me a little, too. I found it hard to think of the Bible other than as a spiritual message and literature for everyone. King James and Cobden-Sanderson would, I felt, just have to take umbrage if my efforts lacked patriotism.

As I saw it, the stories in the Old and New Testaments, taken together, traced man's spiritual journey, his struggling relationship with God, and his witnessing of Christ's life, death and resurrection. I hoped for a design that would show the whole drama in one sweep, from Genesis to the great culmination of Christ's ascension. But I realized that would be expecting rather a lot from one design.

I had always enjoyed drawing the human figure, so my first thought was to have angels. They should be magnificent looking, like the Masai. I found a

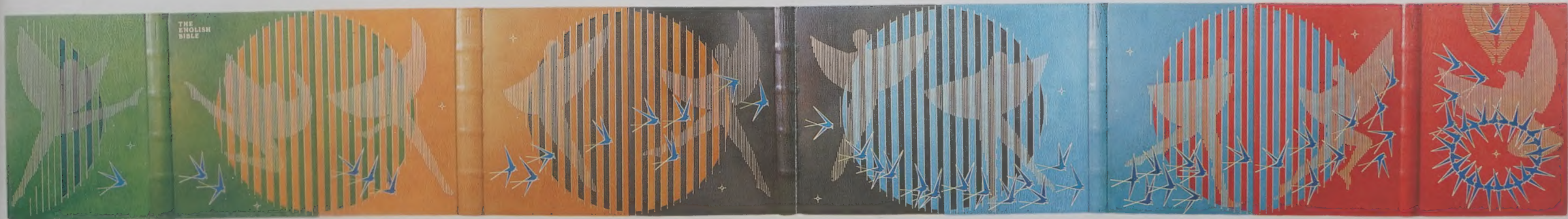
picture of Masai men doing a ritual dance and traced the figures onto paper. From these I created a Masai-like angel with beams of light around him. But the magic of the real Masai wasn't there. Anyway, I wanted a range of dramatic gestures, not the single upright posture shown in the picture of the Masai dancers.

At the local library, I looked through the section on ballet. There was a good book devoted entirely to Rudolf Nureyev, with many photos of him making wonderful leaps as he danced — perfect for drawing angels. But, I thought, angels alone wouldn't be enough.

The first Masai drawing had included a few swallow-like birds. To see small birds migrating was, for me, an emotional experience. What miraculous force, I wondered, enabled those fragile creatures to cross seas and high mountains and by day and night fly untold miles. I decided to use swallow-shaped birds as symbols for mankind.

Such were my thoughts and actions as I faced the making of a design for this so highly respected printing of the most famous of books.

In the completed bindings the beams of light in the early drawing have become onlays that show an emerging world and then worlds of changing colours that link the five volumes. Cover by cover, the birds in gold tooling and blue onlay steadily increase as they make their flight toward the last volume, where those unable to see form themselves into a circle. Nureyev, in the guise of the nine angels, dances beside the birds



and urges them along. The five main colours represent the changing moods that, according to the Bible, occur as man's communion with God grows, is severed, and is renewed again only through Christ: creation, maturity, darkness, sadness, and passion. A pair of hands and a dove are, like the angels, shown in silhouettes of parallel gold lines.

The use of parallel lines to produce simple shapes has been popular with a number of binders. The technique became a passing enthusiasm of my own. Always, on my bindings, I kept the lines equally spaced, so as to give the appearance of an even wash of transparent gold.

When I had completed the five bindings, I found that I could not see the whole design as it was intended to be seen, with the volumes touching together in a straight or gently curving line. My workshop was too small, so I had to be content to look at the design arranged in a circle on top of the main workbench.

Today, thinking about the title, placed only on the first volume, I wonder how I rationalized using the full and proper one instead of simply Bible. I expect that with all those birds around I would have hesitated to use the familiar title: *The Doves Bible*. Perhaps my own Englishness came through. Or did I have a mental picture of Cobden-Sanderson throwing all his type into the Thames — something he actually did — and then of him, in “a very ecstasy of rage,” throwing me in after it?



The English Bible.

Tracing from a photo of Masai men dancing, to be used for reference when drawing angels for cover designs.

SAINT JOHN THE DIVINE. *The Apocalypse*. Woodcuts by Jim Dine. San Francisco: Arion Press, 1982.

Lent by Jeremy M. Norman.

Full black goatskin, with coloured leather onlays and gold and blind tooling. 382 x 282mm. Bound in 1988.

The Book of Revelation has been an inspiration to many artists, and so I looked forward to working on this commission from Jeremy M. Norman. When the book arrived I examined Jim Dine's powerful woodcut illustrations and then began to read the text along with some commentaries.

I found *The Apocalypse* a difficult subject to handle and in my design I ignored nearly all of the mass of symbols it contains. My theme dealt with the conflict between darkness and light, with the beast who speaks like a dragon (the serpent or devil) representing one side and the slain lamb that has seven horns and seven eyes (not all shown in the design) representing the other. Among his illustrations, Dine used faces (his own, Christ's, etc.) and this suggested to me that John's face should be added to the collection. One of the commentators I read referred to the dramatic changes that take place in John's vision as being kaleidoscopic. His use of that metaphor prompted me to give the onlays the appearance of shattered glass.

I wanted to portray the fantastic and colossal episodes of John's vision as a cosmic explosion (or implosion) of light and darkness. But finally I no longer understood precisely what was going on in my drawings, whether the serpent was disappearing into the bottomless pit (or black hole) or not, or whether John's holy Jerusalem (if that is what it is) was going up or whether our modern cities were coming down.

It perhaps didn't matter what I thought because the final design seemed to take on a will of its own. Originally, I had planned to have gold lines radiating from the central image, so as to lead the eye out to the edges of the covers. But, after covering the book, I discovered that the black leather I had used would not take gold tooling, at least not by the traditional methods that I use. I had bought two goatskins in England when, in certain leather conservation circles, aluminium trifluoride was suddenly the rage. Remarkably, although at that time it was known that, when used in the tanning process, the chemical would improve the durability of leather, it seems not to have been generally known that leather so treated would not easily accept gold tooling. I was forced to confine all my gold tooling to the standard vegetable tanned leathers that were used for the onlays.

To compensate for the lack of gold lines, I added broken-glass-style onlays around the edges of the covers. These smoothly polished areas of black on black, together with the radiating blind lines, resulted in an effect more interesting than the one I had intended. And so here was a rare instance of a problem turning into something positive, and of a benediction on a binder that has an almost neurotic fear of things going wrong.



LEONARD BASKIN. *Recollected Fragments of Ornament & Grotesque*. Monotypes by Leonard Baskin. Leeds, MA: The Eremite Press, 1988.

Lent by Travis Beck.

Box binding: full red, native-tanned Nigerian goatskin, with raised bands, leather onlays and gold and blind tooling. 418 x 392mm. Bound in 1989.

Although I had little knowledge of this well-known artist's work when I received Travis Beck's commission, I have since improved and now stand with those who applaud Leonard Baskin's refusal to abandon the use of the human figure as a means of expressing the most profound spiritual feelings. But this very mixed collection of remarkable monotypes included creatures other than human. Some were crudely fantastic, some were beautifully and delicately drawn, and most were sombrely coloured.

Mr Baskin, it is said, does not like decorative art, whereas I quite often do, and as usual I chose a decorative approach for making my design. I tried to suggest the world of nature (represented by ornament) fragmented and rebuilt to form grotesque. I have never been to Florence, the city where this artist encountered the subjects that later became recollected in his prints, but the two animal heads in my design do represent some recollections of my own.

Since boyhood I have been fascinated by birds. Also, at one time I worked as a professional bat catcher for a museum, where I spent many hours preparing skins and bones and cataloguing specimens for its research collections. Therefore, the bird and

bat heads carry special meanings for me. But after completing the drawings for the design, I discovered to my surprise that something in the general shape and position of the bird head appeared not to have come out of my past at all, but had been taken unconsciously from one of the animals among the prints. This provided an immediate example of the kind of borrowing that Leonard Baskin discusses in his introduction.

A quiet colour scheme was chosen, so as not to upstage the artist's generally low-keyed images. The skins used for covering were cut into ten rectangular pieces (fragments) and arranged to form the patterns of mismatched grains that are separated by black lines. The onlays were made from dark chocolate coloured leather. All the tools used for filling in selected areas within the two heads had been made for previous bindings.

Box bindings have been around for a long time. I decided to use one on this occasion because it allowed the wide assortment of differently shaped papers, on which the monotypes were printed, to be bound up as a book. The sides of the box support the weight of the covers and thus prevent the smaller papers from becoming pinched between the larger ones.



L. FRANK BAUM. *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. Illustrated by Barry Moser, with an appreciation by Justin G. Schiller. West Hatfield, MA: Pennyroyal Press, 1985.

Lent by Justin G. Schiller.

Full green goatskin, with coloured leather onlays and gold tooling. 343 x 332mm. Bound in 1989.



In his amusing illustrations, Barry Moser made use of well-known — often political — American personalities, rather than the commonplace figures that occur in Baum's text. I attempted to continue this approach by using well-known and famous symbols of popular American culture, but without any political references. A good number of the illustrations were contained within circles, and perhaps I had this in mind when I set out to make my design, as I was more concerned with following the mood of Mr Moser's work than with closely following Baum.

In the finished binding, the two circles are composed of the colours yellow, red and blue, which with the green of the binding refer to the four important colours in the text. The colours in the circles are arranged to appear like modern motorways with overpasses and underpasses, as may be seen on road maps. Only the yellow road leads to Oz. The two circles are linked so as to suggest a pair of spectacles.

The designs made up from bright and very dark green leathers contained within the circles portray two famous American stars. For the Wizard, I used Harry Houdini. Like the Wizard, Houdini became more of an escape artist than magician. He was also an exposé of frauds — an idea that relates well to Baum's story.

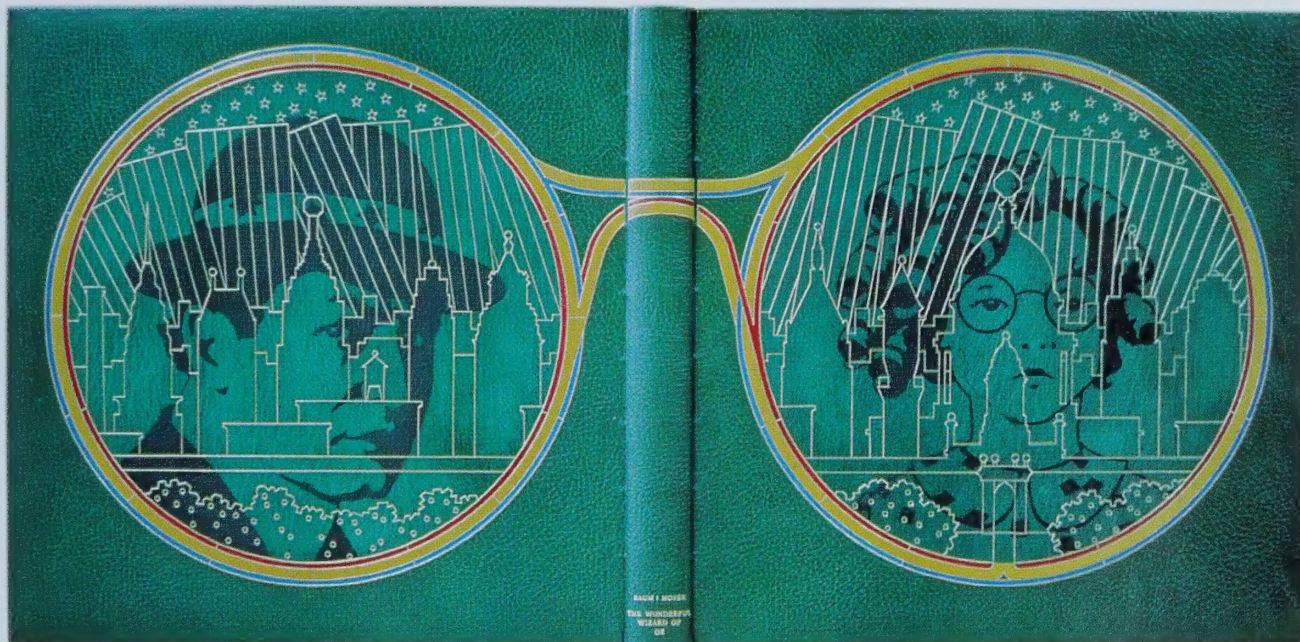
Apparently, MGM's first choice for the part of Dorothy in their 1939 movie was Shirley Temple, but they were unable to arrange for her loan from 20th Century Fox. And so Judy Garland, MGM's second choice, was hired for the part instead. As

Shirley Temple said in her autobiography, "sometimes the gods know best". I used Shirley Temple in my design because she was so strong a symbol of the ideal American child, and maybe because it was fun to make amends, in a minuscule way, for what Ms Temple had once been denied.

For the Emerald City of Oz, in gold line, I took an idea mentioned in a pamphlet by Mr Moser: Oz relates to the name New York and is a play on the alphabetical sequence of letters (N O - Y Z). And as New York is certainly the most famous city in America, this fitted in with my aim of creating an all American design of famous symbols.

The gateway into the City comes from Manhattan Bridge, and the ornamental work on the wall over the gate comes from the roof of New York City Hall. The Wizard's Palace, immediately behind the gate, is of course not from New York but from the Capitol Building, Washington, D.C. The structure on the right of the Palace is from New York City Service Tower, while the building to the left of the Palace is from the tower of the Jefferson Court House. In the centre of the other circle is the Empire State Building, with the Chrysler Tower to the far left of it. I do not know the names of the other buildings because they were not given in the photos from which I made up the silhouettes.

In the text, Baum says, "even the sky above the City had a green tint, and the rays of the sun were green". Instead of the sun, it suited my purpose to show the stars, which I supposed would have been



green, too. But I thought that the rays might have been part of the Wizard's humbug, and so I suggested them in the form of stage backdrops. These rays, along with the stars, refer of course to the most famous of American symbols.

This commission came from Arnold and Miriam Elkind, who were keen collectors, particularly of jewelled and modern bindings. They made the

unusual request that I send them a drawing showing precisely how I intended to bind their book. I complied, but was not happy about being committed to fixed ideas. The photocopies I sent contained only my plans for the gold tooling, along with a few notes on colours. No mention was made of the two portraits. Another unusual request was that their names be included somehow in the work. This I did, putting

them with my own in gold on the leather signature piece inside the back cover. They were "very, very pleased" with the binding.

IRVING ABELLA. *A Coat of Many Colours: Two Centuries of Jewish Life in Canada*. Toronto: Lester & Orpen Dennys Limited, 1990

Lent by Andrea M. Bronfman.

Full black goatskin, with coloured leather onlays and gold tooling. 257 x 228mm. Bound in 1990.



Irving Abella's interesting history of the Jews in Canada was published in conjunction with a travelling exhibition with the same name as the book. In his acknowledgements, Mr Abella mentions "Andrea Bronfman, who is the driving force behind the exhibition which provided the impetus for this book".

In 1985 I was the lucky recipient of the Saidye Bronfman Award for Excellence in the Crafts, and it was perhaps due to this that Andrea Bronfman, Saidye Bronfman's daughter-in-law, commissioned me to bind six copies of *A Coat of Many Colours*, so that she could use them as presents to her friends.

The book is a serious work but is also, especially because of its timing with the exhibition, a celebration. In my design I wanted to capture something of this festive spirit and to show that, although a history, the book was far from being a dull one.

After looking around for appropriate symbols, I quickly came to the decision that the menorah, with its gently upraised arms, and the friendly maple leaf best represented the ideas I had in mind.

Two sets of coloured onlays, one for the maple leaves and the other for the backgrounds, were arranged in prismatic sequences. The colours within the leaves were positioned to coincide more or less

with their complimentary colours on the backgrounds. Among the group of six books, no two colour schemes were made identical.

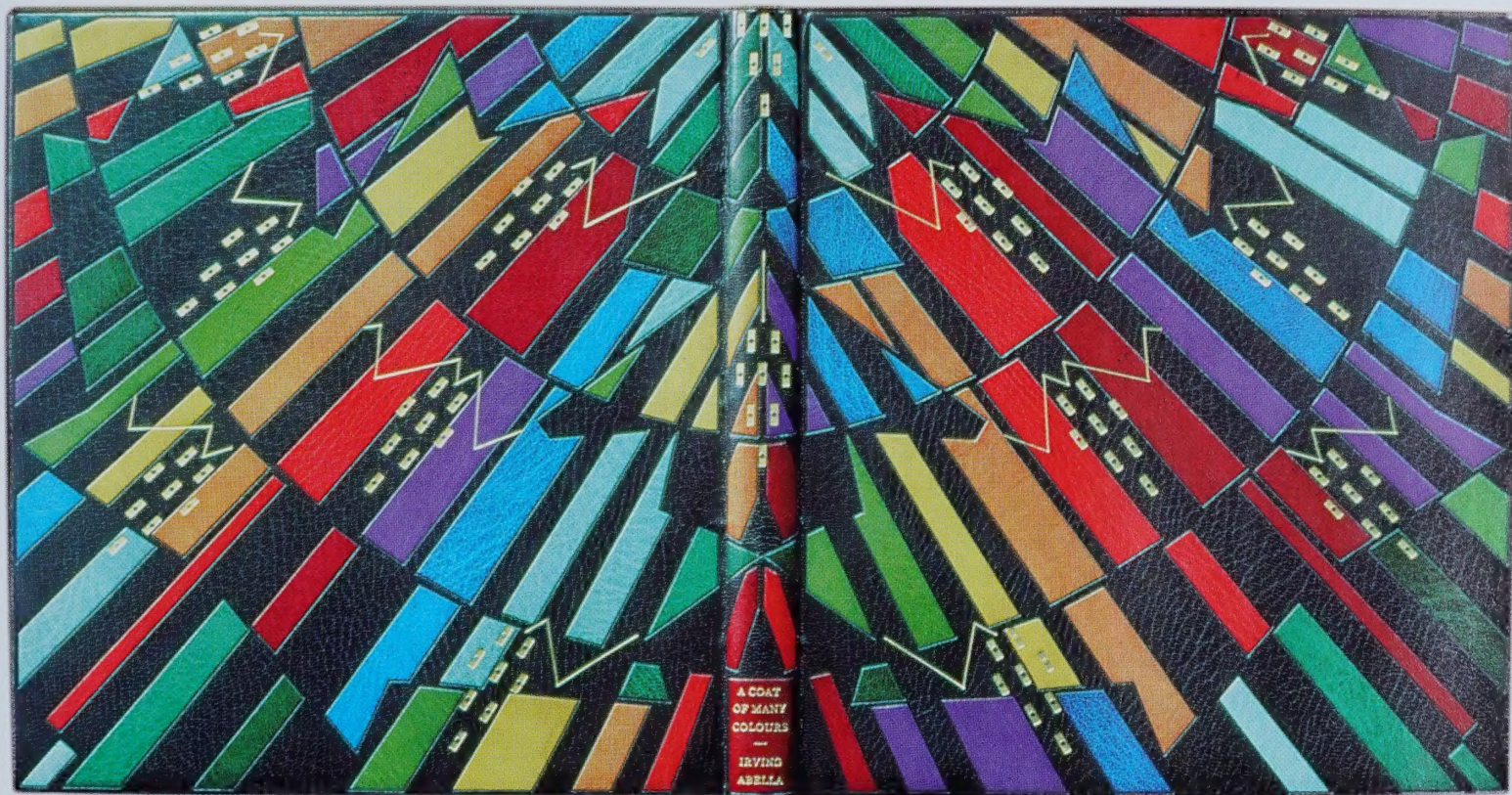
In reading *The Jewish World*, edited by Elie Kedourie, I came across the following:

The symbolism of the vine, vineyard and grapes has been part of the Jewish iconography since the days of Moses.

'Plant vineyards that may yield fruits of increase,' says Psalm CVII. Vineyards were the sign of settled peace and prosperity, the vintage a symbol of God's blessing.

A small rectangular tool was cut and combined with lines to suggest stylized grape vines. When tooled in gold, these grapes formed clusters of lights which appeared to descend from the menorah.

To those who think that the grapes on these particular bindings are really a symbol hinting at the Bronfman family's long and well-known association with the making and selling of wines and spirits, I say that they are not, that they are only a "symbol of God's blessing" given to the Jews — and, it would appear, passed on to me when I had the good fortune to receive this multiple commission.



WILLIAM MORRIS. *A Dream of John Ball and A King's Lesson*. Hammersmith: Kelmscott Press, 24 September 1892.

Lent by Arnold B. Gardner.

Full black goatskin, with raised bands, coloured leather and white paper onlays and gold tooling. 206 x 145mm. Bound in 1991.



From the days when I was an apprentice, William Morris has remained one of my special heroes. Although Morris would probably view our present times with considerable dismay, being disappointed that the causes he espoused and worked hard for have been so little heeded, he might take some consolation in the knowledge that the books he lovingly produced at his Kelmscott Press are now highly praised (and priced) and eagerly sought after. It was with some of Morris's philosophy in mind that I began work on this enjoyable commission from Arnold B. Gardner.

The binding was constructed in the traditional manner with a tight back and raised bands that, largely due to Morris's influence, was revived and popularized by the Arts and Crafts binders during and immediately following Morris's day.

The narrow panels enclosed by the green strapwork of onlays, and the flowers contained in them, derive from the idealized medieval landscape that occurs in the text of Morris's dream: "...all under tillage of various kinds, mostly in small strips...hedged with quick, which was nearly full of white poppies...also a few good roses of the bright-

red nearly single kind." Of course, the white poppy — amusingly taken up by Gilbert and Sullivan — was of special significance to Morris in his story.

The poppy, poppy leaf, rose, and rose leaf were tools that I designed specially for this binding. For making the "open" poppy and rose tools, I used a *cloisonné* technique, silver soldering *cloisons* or preshaped, ribbon-like pieces of copper onto a brass base. The "solid" leaf tools were cut directly into brass, using gravers and needle files.

Creating tools for particular designs is usually a welcome diversion from routine bookbinding. Even the possibility that they may never be used again does not detract from the pleasure I take in making and using such tools, especially as, unlike the books and their bindings, I do not, when the work is finished, have to part with them. The tools constitute a collection of images to which I continue to add and from which I may borrow at any time. They are also souvenirs, memories: poppy, poppy leaf, rose, rose leaf, William Morris, *A Dream of John Ball*.



The Song of Songs. Illustrated by Eric Gill. Waltham St. Lawrence, Berkshire: Printed and published at the Golden Cockerel Press, 1925.

Lent by Shelagh and Franklyn Smith.

Full scarf-joined red and navy goatskins, with leather onlays and gold tooling. 262 x 194mm. Bound in 1992.



This well-known and at one time furtively studied edition of the *Song of Songs* came as a welcome and challenging commission from Shelagh and Franklyn Smith.

It is ironic that, in his introduction, the unnamed editor (Father John O'Connor) would promote this book as being a protest against Solomon's polygamous ideals, when he knew that Eric Gill, a most polygamous and even incestuous man, was to be the book's illustrator. It is doubtful, however, whether a more remarkable artist could have been found to do the job.

If this version is, as O'Connor seemed to imply, close to the original, then it is inconceivable that Solomon, who is shown in such a bad light, actually would have seen the original, let alone have written it. The real author would have needed to be very cautious, and it is easy to see how his work would have been suppressed, even long after Solomon's death.

In his *Animals in art and thought*, Francis Klingender says of Aesop's animals: "...these new symbols could gain a powerful hold on the imagination. When they were used, as in Greece, first as 'slave-language' for the guarded expression of 'dangerous thoughts'

and then for sweetening the pill of moral instruction, they could help to produce a commonsense, matter-of-fact approach to life."

For my design I thought it would be an entertaining contrast to Gill's literal approach if I played the game of "guarded expression," using something like Aesop's symbolic language and the kinds of metaphors from nature with which the *Song of Songs* abounds. In this way I could avoid having to compete directly with Gill's fleshy designs, which leave little room for more of the same. And, perhaps with some personal bias, I could interpret the text as suggesting that the ways of fecund and "dewy" nature are preferable to the confined and unnatural ways of city life.

Therefore, the escaping lovers were represented by the raven, a bird said to be common in Palestine and noted for its monogamous lifestyle. Solomon was represented by the notoriously polygamous peacock, a bird that he imported and which suggests foreign and unnatural ideas.

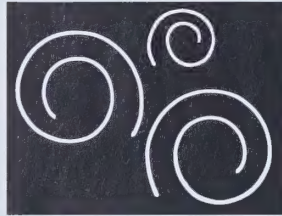
The bee, the flower and leaves of the pomegranate, the "eye" of the peacock feathers, and the small triangle used to make the peacock's crest, were formed with tools made specially for this binding.



ROBERT GRAVES. *I, Claudius*.
London: Arthur Barker, 1934.

Lent by David Mason.

Full dark brown goatskin,
with coloured leather onlays
and gold tooling. 223 x
131mm. Bound in 1994.



Over the years many of my bindings have passed through David Mason's shop in Toronto. When I had completed this commission from David, I returned *I, Claudius* along with a letter that included some explanatory notes:

fairly dense design to reflect intricacies of Graves's novel and to parallel heavy elaborateness usual in Roman ornament;

general style taken from Art Deco (still flourishing at time of this book's publication), which is particularly suitable for expressing the power of the Roman machine that so effectively organized everything from war to public entertainments;

mechanically drawn areas around centre of design to suggest the thousands of individuals who made up the many ranks of Roman society with, among these areas, four realistic beads emerging, passive and aggressive, referring to the numerous characters selected for detailed treatment in the book;

caricature of Claudius derived from a portrait of Robert Graves made by Eric Kennington, and which appears in Graves's Goodbye to All That;

position of hands holding stylus and tablets (or codex) and mask (obvious symbol of deception) derived from what seems to have been a conventional pose used by Roman artists of the period;

Greek-key-style bairdo, a joke (Claudius's head was full of his histories which he wrote in Greek);

a star and die-number patterns (Claudius was an expert on playing dice and wrote a treatise on the subject) used as symbols for the prophecy and chance which governed the survival of both Claudius and his autobiography;

scroll on "lapel" marks Claudius as a scholar and also forms the end of the circle that encloses his portrait, suggesting the scroll in which the account of his life is recorded;

Claudius preferred the new style of book which was "sewn"; the scroll (three tools made specially for this binding) and codex ornaments (see spine) refer to the two book forms that he used;

the title of the book is "announced" within a frame shaped like the unit emblems carried by standard bearers in Roman processions;

design contains a small play on the "I" (eyes) in the title.

In an attempt to further impress my client, I truthfully added that the binding "took a lot of work, two weeks just to do the gold tooling after the design and onlays had been applied".



WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE.
The Sonnets of William Shakespeare. Illustrated with wood engravings by Mary Kuper. Los Angeles: The Plantin Press, 1974.

Lent by Jeremy M. Norman.

Full maroon goatskin, with coloured leather onlays and gold tooling. 206 x 145mm. Bound in 1994.

I have done more commissions for Jeremy M. Norman than for anyone else. To his establishment in San Francisco I have sent sets and single volumes ranging in size from an enormous Bremer Presse Vesalius down to this small book of Shakespeare's Sonnets.

Reading through all the sonnets was pleasant work, but for some expert analysis of them I turned to what A. L. Rowse had to say in his Shakespeare biography. After a passage describing the humiliations and indignities that the poet suffers because of his own and then his youthful friend's involvement with the mysterious dark mistress, Rowse goes on to speak of how Shakespeare shows forgiveness. Then follows: "It is this moral quality arising out of an equivocal situation that strips all three naked and from which none can escape with rectitude or honour, that paradoxically lends the Sonnets in the end their dignity."

Vine-shaped outlines together with leaves arranged singly and in two's and three's were used to suggest the entanglements and changing relations that take place among the lovers. As in the poems, only with less difficulty, the three figures in the design

require a bit of sorting out. The young man, loosely based on how I imagined the youthful Earl of Southampton may have looked, sits beside Shakespeare on the front cover but is almost out of the picture on the back. The slim but mature woman has a provocative manner. Whether she is rejecting the young man or being enticed by him is not clear, but together they seem to swing through the figures of Shakespeare, who, viewing the scene from different ways, and of course with quill in hand, sits back to back with himself. In the poems, Shakespeare goes on and on about the passing of youthfulness and beauty, and to reflect this concern I showed the leaves fading from dark to pale green and then becoming yellow with decay.

The leaf tool was one from a set made for a previous binding. Joining up the constantly changing curves of the tooled lines presented a demanding exercise in gouge work. For success with this kind of pattern, it helps to have a large selection of tools. But it also helps to have the ability to change the design and make do with what you have when the exact tools needed are not there.



BRAM STOKER. *Dracula*.
Westminster: Archibald
Constable and Company, 1897.

Lent by Eric Robertson.

Full maroon goatskin, with
red and black leather and
white tawed skin onlays and
gold tooling. 196 x 128mm.
Bound in 1995.



It was as a result of David Mason's encouragement that Eric Robertson, the Toronto composer and musician, decided to have me bind this first edition of a great vampire classic. Therefore, as has happened to my advantage before, I was compelled to study a book which otherwise I might not have chosen to read.

Despite my previous doubts, I found the story quite fascinating — even more so after reading Leonard Wolf's *The Essential Dracula*. Particularly interesting was Stoker's constant manipulation of nature's laws. His supernatural beings had their limitations, but what made them frightening was their ability to break certain rules of physics, to suddenly perform the unexpected by passing through and beyond what are normally considered impassable barriers. Also alarming was Dracula's relentless drive coupled with the sense of foreboding created when his victims unknowingly began to attract him, even over great distances, by means of some unseen force.

Binding designs can sometimes be made to carry greater meaning if they seem to telescope time or overlap events, so as to reveal simultaneously both cause and effect. I wanted in my design to suggest Dracula sensing, from his mountain home, the girl's far-off existence. He doesn't know where precisely she is, and so he does not look directly at her. But his strange power can infect the particles of dust in the moonbeams and can inhabit wild animals, all of which may communicate to him the whereabouts of his potential victims. The person he seeks, Mina or perhaps Lucy, is seen as though within the full moon, protected, for the time being, by the garlic plants and the circle around her.

I tried to make Dracula fit the report that Jonathan Harker gives. After describing him as being an old man, tall and clean shaven but for a long, white moustache, Harker says,

His face was a strong — a very strong — aquiline, with high bridge of the thin nose and peculiarly arched nostrils; with lofty domed forehead, and hair growing scantily round the temples, but profusely elsewhere. His eyebrows were very massive, almost meeting over the nose, and with bushy hair that seemed to curl in its own profusion. The mouth, so far as I could see it under the heavy moustache, was fixed and rather cruel-looking, with peculiarly sharp white teeth; these protruded over the lips, whose remarkable ruddiness showed astonishing vitality in a man of his years. For the rest, his ears were pale and at the tops extremely pointed; the chin was broad and strong, and the cheeks firm though thin. The general effect was one of extraordinary pallor.

My firsthand knowledge of vampire bats was put to use when I came to shaping Dracula's incisor teeth. Dracula's eyes were said to have a red light to them when he was in fury. And his hands were described as being broad, with squat fingers, and with hairs in the centres of the palms; his nails, as being long and fine and cut to sharp points.

Five tools were made: two curls for creating the girl's hair, a flower head and a seed for the garlic plants, and an open tool for the droplets of blood.



KENNETH GRAHAME. *The Wind in the Willows*. London: Methuen and Co., 1908.

Lent by David Mason.

Full green goatskin, with coloured leather onlays and gold tooling. 192 x 126mm. Bound in 1995.



Texts that are strongly associated with particular illustrators can be a problem when it comes to trying to make original designs for them. How can a designer escape the influence of, or comparison with, the long established and familiar images? It seems indelibly fixed in my mind that *The Wind in the Willows* is synonymous with the incomparable black and white illustrations made for the book by Ernest Shepard; just as John Tenniel's illustrations seem essential for any authentic printing of Lewis Carroll's Alice books. So, when David Mason asked me to bind this first edition of Kenneth Grahame's most famous work, I was relieved to discover that it was not illustrated, except for a little-known and ordinary-looking frontispiece by Graham Robertson.

There was, however, an attractive gold-blocked design on the original but mould-damaged binding. It showed Rat and Mole asleep in their boat, with Pan among some reeds on the shore. I found it tempting to use Pan in my own design, but quickly changed my mind after reading, in Peter Green's biography, that Grahame had been opposed to having Pan illustrated in his book. "Perhaps a little bit of his shadow, but no more," Grahame had pleaded.

Possibly because of some strong feelings of my own on subjects that also upset Grahame, I decided to allude, in a decorative way, to the despoiling of nature and the abandoning of time-honoured principles. For Grahame, I think these things were

partly symbolized by the intrusion of the motor car, with all its noise and filth, into his beloved English countryside.

Toad's loyal friends were amazed to discover that good old Toad had fallen prey to the sinister allure of the infernal combustion engine. Without actually having a car in the design, but by assembling the incongruous group of objects that helped to form Toad's wild imaginings, I tried to show something of Toad's out-of-place and ridiculous enthusiasm for cars and, even worse, his disrespect for his friends' values. On the other hand, through the colour of his clothes and by the plants that ornament them, each of Toad's nature-loving friends represents commendable ideals that relate to the environment to which he naturally belongs: Mole, the earth and meadows; Rat, the lily-covered river; and Badger, The Wild Wood.

Although water rats (voles really) have five digits on the front foot, I found it less cluttering to use only four. And as water rats do have rather long tails, I thought it would be wise to allow Rat to hold his, so that Badger couldn't step on it.

Eight small finishing tools were cut specially for this binding: Badger's oak leaf, acorn, and chevron for his trousers; Rat's water lily, lily pad, and stem for same; Mole's flower; and Toad's cog-wheel.

In a letter to David, I concluded by writing,

Although this binding is small and may not seem complicated, working out all the details of the

THE WIND IN
THE WILLOWS

KENNETH
GRAHAME



*design, making and applying
the onlays, cutting tools and,
as is my habit, tooling all the
gold at least twice, has occu-
pied me for a good many
weeks. And like Grabame, I
have become fond of these
weird little animals, so that I
hope you will like them, too,
and that you will find this
binding to your taste.*

As David still owns this bind-
ing, I am assuming the best, that
he wishes to keep it, rather than
he can't find someone to buy it.

GREG GATENBY (editor).
Whales: A Celebration.
Toronto: Prentice-Hall
Canada, Inc., and Lester &
Orpen Dennys Limited, 1983.

Lent by Michael Wilcox

c.280 x 300mm.

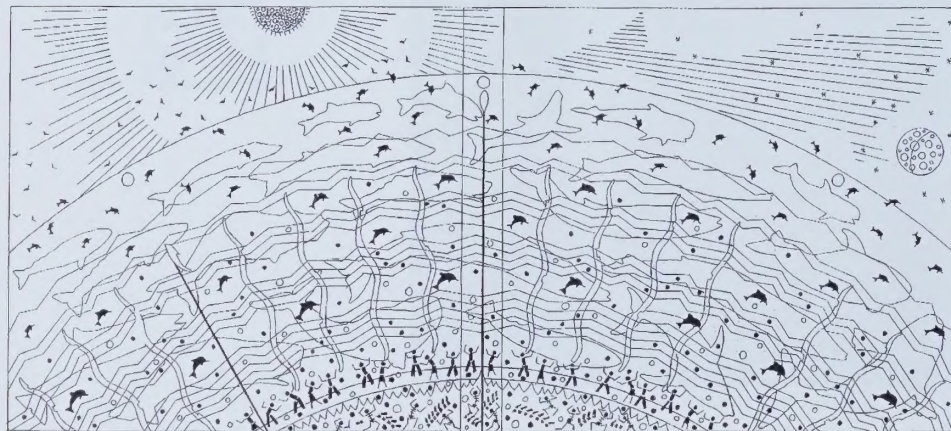
Of the bindings dealt with here, this is the only one to which I cannot look back. Neither can I provide a photograph of it because, at the time of preparing this catalogue, it is just an idea represented by a few drawings. Nevertheless, it is intended that the binding will be completed in time to be displayed along with the others.

In 1997 I received a grant from the Canada Council for the Arts, for the purpose of binding books of my choice to be used in exhibitions or competitions. So, *Whales* is one of the books that I have chosen to bind. I hope that the finished work will be seen as proof of my continuing commitment to the craft of fine bookbinding.

Greg Gatenby's aim in producing this book was to increase public awareness of the need to protect cetaceans from commercial slaughter. The book contains an astonishing collection of good things, works both old and new, many created specially for this project, by artists, writers and musicians.

My first impulse was to make a design showing a vertical cross-section of the sea, with whales in the lower part and humans in boats forming a sort of scum on the surface of the water. Instead, I now plan to use a decorative approach and indeed have a celebration. But there is to be a slightly ambiguous and perhaps disquieting touch, something that reflects on the question in George Woodcock's splendid poem, "Arion Sings of his Rescue"

*Does it console me as my song grows darker
That those who kill the free destroy
Their own freedom, those who destroy
The wise die from their own folly?*



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WILLOX
2001

